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Adventure

Gordon Young
Georges Surdez
W. C. Tuttle
Henry S. White
John Scarry
W. Townend
Clements Ripley
Eugene Cunningham
Bruce Johns

3 Complete Novelettes

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LIFE INSURANCE WOULD HAVE PREVENTED THIS

The Prudential Insurance Company of America

EDWARD D. DUFFIELD, President Home Office, NEWARK, N. J.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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One New Serial, Four Complete Novelettes

WHEN "*Black*" *Renalds* and "*Red*" *Allister* opened warfare on the nesters they hadn't counted on the appearance of *Norman Standish*. Neither had a number of others. Everybody thought that *Colonel Standish's* tenderfoot son would stay in the East where he belonged. Even his half-brother *Bob* didn't expect him to turn up at the Star Y. Then the telegram came. "STANDISH OF THE STAR Y," a five-part story of the cattle range, by Gordon Young, begins in the next issue.

MAKING the world safe for democracy meant but one thing to "*Little Joe.*" His early training as a Kentucky ridge-runner bred in him a love for firearms, which, when the Great War came on, urged him to heroics only to possess the enemy's weapons. "THE LUGER," a complete novelette, by Leonard H. Nason, in the next issue.

THREE centuries ago the perils of Hudson Bay were not limited to the Winter's freeze and the sudden, devastating storms. Rival nations were at war; fur-pirates plied their nefarious trade and Indians changed sides with bewildering frequency. And through it all—the bitter cold, bloody fights, starvation, death—*Crawford* followed his Destiny. "THE STAR GOES NORTH," a complete novelette, by H. Bedford-Jones, in the next issue.

"MAT FEVER" means the losing of a man's grip in the insidious tropic climate. *Carchot* had mat fever, and the watchful natives rose against him. He might have gone under except that the last person in the world he expected to see in the South Seas appeared at that moment, and through necessity his manhood rose above his weakness. "THE COME-BACK," a complete novelette, by J. D. Newsom, in the next issue.

THE military cable was broken down Misamis-way and had to be repaired in spite of a hundred thousand hostile Moros. So—"SEND MILLIKIN TO MISAMIS," a complete novelette, by Ralph R. Guthrie, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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NOV. 10 1923
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Adventure

BLIND TRAILS

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE BY W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Reputation," "The Misdeal," etc.

"PEACE RIVER" PARKER turned from unsaddling a sweat-marked gray horse and picked up his saddle. He was a tall, gaunt-looking cowpuncher. His bat-winged chaps were polished from much usage, his thin cotton shirt indefinite of color was topped by a black muffler and atop his head rode a high-crown sombrero.

"Peace" Parker was not handsome by any manner of means. His hair was an unruly mop of almost roan color, his nose much larger than necessary and a mouth all out of proportion. But his eyes were a clear gray and set wide apart.

Now he stood in the shade of the tall, pole corral, holding the saddle by one hand, while he squinted toward the Cross L ranch-house a hundred yards away. It was a low, rambling sort of a building, with a wide veranda running across the front. It had been originally a one-room affair, painted white, with blue trimmings. But, as each addition had been built, it seemed as though the taste in decorations had changed, and each addition had a color all its own.

Behind and on the opposite side of the house grew several tall cottonwoods, while in the front yard there had been some attempt to grow a flower garden and some rose bushes, but the effort of water-bucket irrigation had been too much and the garden did not thrive.

There was a black horse tied to a corner of the veranda; a racy-looking animal, surmounted by a silver-decorated, swell-forked saddle, which flashed in the sunlight, as the black moved impatiently.

Peace Parker looked at this horse for a

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long time, but no hint of his thoughts was depicted on his face. He turned his head slowly and looked down at his saddle. It was as if he were trying to remember just what he was going to do with that saddle.

A slight twitch of his head, which might have been a negative answer to one of his unspoken questions, and he went slowly toward the bunk-house, a long, one-room structure, facing the same way as the ranch-house, but farther back toward the tall barn.

As he stopped at the bunk-house door, a man came out of the kitchen, slammed the door and stood on the narrow step, looking around. He saw Peace Parker and greeted him with an upward jerk of his hand and arm as he strode down toward him.

This man was "Cross L" Marshall, owner of the ranch. He was a smaller man than Parker; a typical old-time cattleman. He was slightly bow-legged and walked with elbows bent at his sides. An enormous hunk of tobacco deformed one side of his face and caused one of his mustaches to assume a belligerent angle. His lips were slightly compressed and his blue eyes seemed to reprove Peace Parker.

"What's achin' yuh?" Peace smiled slightly at the older man.

Marshall did not speak for several moments. He turned and squinted toward the house, spat explosively and scratched his shoulders against the bunk-house wall. Then he shifted his tobacco and squinted at Peace.

"Achin' me? Huh!"

He jerked his thumb toward the house.

"Whatcha think? More candy. Uh-huh. —— it, he uses vas'leen on his hair!"

"They tell me," said Peace slowly, "that it's good for the hair. Looks kinda slick and pretty."

"Yeah?" A shift of the tobacco made the mustache assume a more belligerent attitude.

"Does, eh?"

"You don't hate vaseline, do yuh?" queried Peace.

"No, but by ——!"

Cross L Marshall glared at Peace and shook his head violently.

"I don't sabe you, Peace. Yo're what Jim Horn used to call a en-ig-maw. Yeah, yuh are. Yo're like some of the race horses them slickers brought here last Summer. One of 'em had a stifle, two ringbones and a broken nose.

"Couldn't run. Course they couldn't run. How in —— could that kind of a critter run, I ask yuh? Jim Horn said it was a en-ig-maw, whatever that is. I bet agin' it and lost five hundred dollars and a span of work horses."

Peace Parker smiled softly.

"But I ain't got no ring-bones nor——"

"Yes, yuh have," interrupted Marshall, "Yours are inside yore head, where they don't show open-like. Them is the worst kind t' have."

Marshall spat thoughtfully and nodded his head.

"As a cow-hand, yo're first-class, Peace. Yeah, I'd go so far as to say that you sabe the cow business, but when it comes to anythin' else, you qualify as a first-class —— fool. What do yuh think of that?"

Marshall squinted quizzically at Peace and waited for him to speak.

"Maybe," said Peace softly, "if I wasn't a first-class —— fool, I might be somethin' better than a first-class cow-hand."

"Aw-w-w ——, I didn't mean it that-away."

Marshall's tone was contrite and he grasped Peace by the arm.

"You make me so —— mad, Peace! I say things that I don't mean, don'tcha know it? Yo're the best danged——"

Marshall stopped and glared toward the porch.

"Peace River Parker, I—I dunno."

Peace smiled at Marshall's serious face.

"What do yuh reckon I better do, Marshall?"

"Do?"

The mustaches bristled again.

"By grab, if it was me, I'd go up there and—uh——"

"No, yuh wouldn't."

Peace shook his head.

"Now let me tell yuh about me, Cross L. Jess is of age. She can do about as she pleases. If Frank Campion comes to see her, what right have I got to object?"

Peace smiled softly and shook his head.

"He ain't comin' to see me."

"My gosh, you two are engaged, ain'tcha?"

"Ye-e-es, but we ain't married, Cross L."

"All right, all right! None of my —— business, eh? Ain't got nothin' t' say about who I git for a son-in-law, eh? This is gittin' to be a fine country. Feller can't have nothin.' When that Campion leaves,

I'm goin' t' give Jess a little —— of a good talk, y'betcha."

"You let her alone," advised Peace coldly.

"Thasso?" Marshall squinted closely at Peace.

"Say, what in ——'s the matter with you? Don'tcha want her?"

Peace stared at Marshall for a moment and then stooped over to unbuckle one of his spurs. It took several moments to remove the two spurs, which gave him time to evade the direct question.

"That gray bronc bucked half-way to End-Gate Creek this mornin,' Cross L. Dang near made me grab leather. Ain't been shook up thataway for quite a while. Ought to sell him to Barney Edwards, I reckon. Barney is pickin' up broncs for some of the Eastern rodeos, and that gray would make some of them contesters ride high and handsome, y'betcha."

"Uh-huh," uninterestedly. "You do it. Didja hear anythin' new in Tarp City?"

Peace shook his head.

"No-o-o. I kinda thought I'd hear from Gus Sinks, but there wasn't no word. Feller from Sun Prairie said that the feed was pretty good agin. They had a good lot of rain up there, he said.

"I told Gus to let me know if he got any kind of an offer for them sheep, but I don't reckon there's been any buyers through there lately. I'd sure like to get them off my hands."

Cross L Marshall grunted explosively and Peace turned. Frank Campion had vaulted the porch-rail and was preparing to mount the black horse. Jess Marshall, dressed all in white, leaned across the railing and talked to him.

From his raiment, Frank Campion was either a range dandy or a "dude cowboy," just out of college. He was dark complexioned, thin-faced and sported a tiny mustache. His hair was so sleek that it glistened in the sun like patent-leather and was of the latest approved cut.

His clothes, patterned after the range fashion, were of the finest quality, but he mounted his horse with the ease and grace of a top-hand cowpuncher.

Cross L Marshall was swearing softly to himself, as Campion galloped away toward the main road, and Peace River looked curiously at him. Jess had turned away from their sight.

"What you got against Campion?" asked Peace.

"Not a danged thing! I just hate the name, Peace. Once upon a time, I knocked —— out of a Campion. It was down in Wyoming a long time ago. I reckon it was a dirty deal, but I was kinda young and wild in them days.

"I know yuh won't repeat it so I'll tell yuh how it was. Me and Joe Campion was bunkies in them days. It was a lot easier to lift a bunch of cows than to work at forty a month; so we kinda helped ourselves.

"We was around the town of Searchlight, if I remember right. Anyway, me and Joe got stuck on the same girl. We had a bunch of cows tucked away on a branch of Lost Cow river, waitin' for the right time to drift 'em across the divide.

"Then we proceeds to git stuck on this girl. I reckon we made love jist like we stole cows—kinda fast-like. If that girl had been twins, everythin' would 'a' been fine, but one girl ain't enough for two gun-packin' lovers. Anyway," Marshall spat reflectively, "we settled it out of court and I hammered —— out of Joe."

"Bein' a pair of danged fools, I reckon we thought that settled which one was to get the girl. Anyway, Joe had a danged mean disposition and he goes to the sheriff and has a talk with him about me.

" 'Course I don't know this until the sheriff asks me to rattle my hocks out of town. He says that I'm suspected of covetin' my neighbor's property and that I'd better high-tail it out while the gate is open.

"Me and him kinda talks thing over and I finds that this danged Campion is responsible. Joe decides to set the law on my trail. Then I asks the sheriff how he'd like to put the deadwood on a rustler and I finds him plumb willin.' "

Marshall laughed shortly.

"I was mad then and I'm mad yet. I told the sheriff where to find that bunch of cows, and if he watched long enough he'd find the man who put 'em there. Then I went to Joe and told him I was foggin' out that night, 'cause the sheriff was onto me. Joe sure sympathized a heap with me and promised to split the cow money with me later on.

"And that was the last time I ever heard of the dirty pup. I never heard what happened. He sure tried to frame me into

the penitentiary and beat me out of the girl I had won with m' bare hands."

"Didja go and tell the girl good-by?" asked Peace.

"—— no! She was the sheriff's daughter."

Marshall chuckled and bit off a fresh chew, while Peace leaned against the bunkhouse door and grinned at Marshall.

"I'll bet you was a tough rooster when you was young, Cross L."

"Dang right! Play 'em high and sleep in the street—that was me. But I had brains when it come to wimmin.'"

Peace smiled softly and shook his head.

"I don't s'pose I have," he admitted, "but I'll likely tell somebody that I did have—when I get older. Lookin' back kinda gives folks a wrong impression of what they've done.

"I ain't never got the combination, Cross L. Women, to me, is a heap like a roulette wheel. I guess red and she comes black. I'll bet on a horse, but never on a woman. I reckon that God A'mighty made 'em thataway on purpose, so that a fool man won't get so smart that he thinks he knows it all."

"Meanin' that I don't know wimmin, Peace River?"

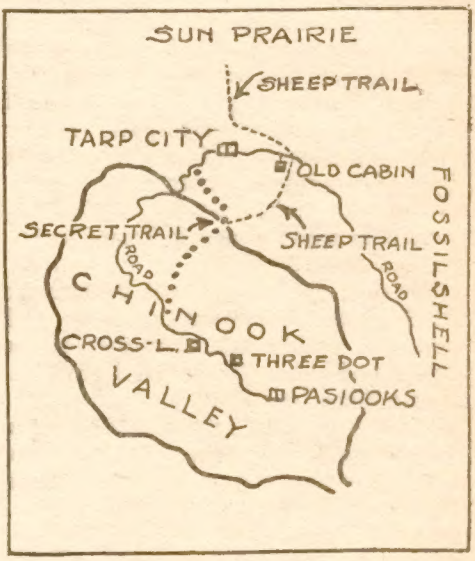
"Yeah. And meanin' that you know —— well yuh don't. Want me to bring them Herefords up from the Bar X Bar tomorrow?"

"Always want to change the subject, when it's somethin' I know all about," complained Cross L. "Talk cows! You don't know nothin' but cows, Peace River Parker. I wish t'gosh yuh knows more about wimmin. I hope that Campion gits bucked off on his vas-leen hair and skids plumb out of Chinook Valley, that's what I wish. But—" quickly—"he sure does sabe wimmin', y'betcha."

THE Valley of the Chinook was practically a mountain-locked stronghold of the cattlemen. It was about thirty miles in length with an average width of seven miles. At the north end of the valley several glacier-fed streams met to form the Chinook River, which wound its crooked way southward, feeding from more tributaries until it roared its formidable way out through a snake-like box cañon at the extreme south end and joined with the Fossilshell River twenty miles beyond.

Poncho Pass, a V-shaped notch in the cliffs which encircled the valley, was the only well-known entrance and exit. The road was a succession of narrow grades, climbing out of the valley to where it sloped sharply off to the shipping center, Tarp City.

Pasiooks was the only town in the valley and was situated nearly midway. At one time it had been an old French trading post, and the Indians named it with the Chinook word which meant French. Pasiooks was about thirty miles from Tarp City, which was the county seat of that particular county.



The Chinook was a cattlemen's paradise, and many a stock-man looked with envious eyes upon the rolling hills, the many cottonwood lined streams which furnished an abundance of water and the encircling, impassable range of mountains which precluded any chance of cattle-stealing and served to break the force of Winter storms.

With Poncho Pass as the only outlet, horse and cattle thieves left Chinook severely alone. The sheep-men grumbled at the name. Their only range, the Sun Prairie country, was sheeped out and dotted with the bones of blizzard and drouth victims. To the south of them was the Fossilshell cattle range, where cowpunchers rode the dead-line, that no sheep might stray across.

But the cattlemen of the Chinook lived secure in their own tight little valley, herded their fat cattle over Poncho Pass to

the loading pens at Tarp City, banked their checks at Pasiooks and waited for the next herd to fatten on the rich bunch-grass.

Bart Severn had owned the Three Dot outfit for several years and was rated as a rich man, but he hated the narrow confines of the Chinook, and when Frank Campion offered a big price for the Three Dot, Severn sold out to him.

The price was almost prohibitive, but Campion paid it willingly. He proved himself to be a plunger; a gambler who played money instead of his cards. Instead of keeping the Three Dot cowpunchers he brought in "Tiny" Bender, a giant of a man, Gus Mehl and "Blackie" Erne.

They were all capable looking men and minded their own business. Once a month they went on a "bust" in Tarp City, and Frank Campion went with them. Bender, Mehl and Erne did not associate with any of the Chinook punchers, but seemed to hold themselves aloof.

But Frank Campion was a "mixer." He drank hard, rode wildly and was belligerent in his cups but he also danced well, sang in a ringing baritone voice and never seemed to lack for something to say. There was no denying the fact that Frank Campion was fast becoming the most popular young bachelor in the Valley of the Chinook.

Peace River Parker had been foreman for the Cross-L for a long time, and was respected by every man and woman in the valley. A few months prior to this time, Peace had just finished a prison term although innocent of the charge.

His return had stopped a sheep invasion of the valley, and ended in the death of the invaders after Peace's innocence of the former charge had been proven.

And Peace Parker had inherited the sheep, as a payment for the years he had lost in the prison. One of the guilty parties, a weasel-faced outlaw, Gus Sinks, whom Peace had saved from the enraged citizens of Tarp City, had been sentenced by Peace to herd that particular band of sheep.

And Gus Sinks went gladly. He would have walked through burning brimstone for Peace River Parker. Sinks was a one-idea man and that idea was to serve Peace Parker regardless of what it might entail. Thereupon he trailed the big herd of bleating sheep into a land which was cursed by all cowpunchers and became a sheepherder.

And to a cattleman or cowpuncher, "Greater love hath no man shown than to turn shepherd through friendship."

Peace Parker was engaged to Jess Marshall, but, as Peace told Cross L Marshall, they were not married yet. Jess Marshall's mother was dead, but she had left Jess a sweet disposition and capabilities beyond those of the average girl. Jess was not a beautiful girl, as beauty standards are measured, but she was attractive and worth looking at more than once.

Peace Parker had worshiped her for years, and she had confessed her love for him, but still he hesitated over the marriage problem.

"Yuh gotta be sure, Peace River," he told himself time and again. "I'm sure about me, but can she look across the table three times a day at this face of mine and still keep her sweet disposition? I'd hate to think she can't, but I'd rather find it out ahead of time."

He did not show by word or deed that he resented the visits of Frank Campion which were becoming more frequent. He did not mention it to Jess. Jim Horn and Bert Hart, the other two cowpunchers, resented it openly. They were loyal to Peace River and agreed that Frank Campion was breeding a lot of trouble for himself.

They knew that Peace Parker would fight a buzz-saw with his bare hands and that no man in that country was as swift and deadly with a six-shooter.

"I tell yuh, Campion's goin' to arrive home without his top-knot some of these days," declared Jim Horn, "and old Peace River'll be wearin' a vaseline-slicked scalp on his belt. Yuh can jist push the old Peace feller so far and then somethin' rips."

"I've got a danged good notion to say somethin' to Jess," said Bert Hart. "She ought to know that she's smokin' her pipe in a niter-glycerin' fact'ry."

"You lay off that kinda stuff," advised Jim. "She's plumb enamored by that slick-ear and if you start any argument she'll think Peace sent yuh."

"Yeah, I reckon that's right, Jim. I dunno what in —— Campion wants a cow-ranch for. If I had his money, I'll be danged if anybody could sell me a ranch. I'd go to Helena and buy me three suits of clothes, three shirts, three pairs of socks and some neckties. Yessir, I'd go plumb hawg-wild on clothes. I'd get me a derby hat; one of them flat-topped jiggers, and

some heel-yuh-trope per-fume. Mamma mine, I'd sure hang on the dog! That's the way to do when yuh got money."

"I wouldn't."

Jim stretched out in the shade of the bunk-house and began rolling a cigaret.

"I'd buy me a —— of a good bronc and I'd hit for the South Sea Islands. I'm plumb sick and tired of wearin' flannel underclothes and buckin' blizzards in the Winter. They say that folks don't have to wear flannels down there in the Winter, and that's the range I'm headin' for when I get rich."

"You've got a —— of a idea of how to spend money!" snorted Bert. "Yuh don't need money down there."

"Tha's all right, Bert. Anythin' to get rid of wearin' them danged woolly shirts. I can go there if I want to, can't I? You ain't tryin' to stop me, are yuh?"

"Go ahead," magnanimously. "Don't let me stop yuh, cowboy. I'll take mine to Helena and buy out a clothing store. I've allus wanted one of them flat-topped derby hats."

All of which serves to give an idea of the lofty ambitions of Bert Hart and Jim Horn. In appearance they were as unlike as their ambitions. Jim was thin, dark of features and with a crooked nose, while Bert was fleshy, blond, and his fat face was decorated with a stubby nose, almost bridgeless. His eyes were set far apart and almost Oriental in contour.

But they were both top-hands in the rangeland and had been with the Cross L for more than two years.

THE visits of Frank Campion annoyed Cross L Marshall. He spluttered and ——ed everybody for everything, but did not speak about it to Jess. He knew her too well for that. She was a chip off the old block, as far as resenting interference was concerned, and Cross L knew that a word from him would not be well received.

Which accounts for the fact that Cross L did not keep his word and "give her a little —— of a good talk, y'betcha."

Peace was in his usual good humor that evening and several times he caught Jess watching him from across the supper table. He felt that she was comparing him to Frank Campion and it made him conscious of the fact that, as far as facial and tonsorial beauty was concerned, he was hardly a match.

But he felt no anger against Campion; none against Jess. Perhaps, down deep in his big heart he felt a bitter ache against an unkind fate, but he was big enough to keep it hidden.

"It'll all come out in the wash," he assured himself that night. "I reckon I'm playin' for the Double O on this old human roulette wheel and there's a lot of odds agin' me. Mebbe the old dealer has got the thing fixed, but I'm still hopin' to win out. If I don't, I'm just a homely old cowpuncher, and I'll get along—kinda."

The next day was Saturday and pay-day, which was the big day for the cowpuncher. Hart and Horn both decided to go to Tarp City; so Peace, needing a new pair of overalls and boots, decided to go with them. Peace decided to leave the Bar X Bar Herefords until Monday, as both of his cowpunchers were eager for a fling at the Tarp City games. Just before they saddled their horses, Frank Campion, Mehl, Erne and Bender rode past, heading toward the Pass. They did not even wave toward the Cross L boys, but swept past at a gallop, looking straight ahead.

"Them jaspers need a curryin'," growled Hart. "You'd think they was the four kings of Calcutta."

Hart knew nothing of kings and less of Calcutta, but no one disputed his statement.

"They sure are uppity as ——!"

Jim Horn grunted an agreement as he shook out his rope.

"Mebbe," thoughtfully, "somebody will curry 'em."

Peace swung his saddle off the peg and looked back at Jim.

"Keep clear of that gang, if yuh know what's good for yuh, Jim," he said slowly. "Bender looks like he could whip a dozen men at once, and they're all slickers with a gun, if yuh can judge by the way they wear 'em."

"Sa-a-ay!" drawled Jim in astonishment. "You ain't scared of that outfit, are yuh, Peace River?"

"Well," Peace grinned softly and unfolded a gaudy saddle-blanket, "I ain't scared—no. You fellers might drink quite a lot tonight, and whisky kinda makes a feller cover too much territory in his remarks. Whisky sure spoils yore sense of distance, direction and discretion, and I

don't want no cripples loafin' around here."

"We'll get a lunch while they're gettin' a feast," said Hart meaningly, but added quickly, "we ain't startin' no trouble, yuh understand, but we'll be Johnny at the rat-hole if it does start."

Peace smiled softly and led the way out to the corral. He knew that the two cowboys, after a few drinks, would not wait for trouble to start and he hated to think that they might tangle with the Campion gang.

With practically all of the cowboys from Chinook and those from the Fossilshell in Tarp City, there was no chance that a trouble hunter would not be accommodated. He knew that Buck Houston, the sheriff, would keep order as long as possible to salve his own conscience and then go home, trusting in the Lord that nothing serious would happen.

Barney McManus, the deputy, would dog Houston's footsteps until Houston went home, and then Barney would proceed to forget that he was the sole representative of law and order and become an ordinary cowpuncher again with a cowpuncher's idea of things as they should be.

Tarp City was a he-man's town on payday, and Peace Parker found the hitch-racks already filled when they rode in dusty and tired from the trip. Hart and Horn immediately stabled their horses, but Peace tied his to a hitch-rack, along with a nondescript lot of broncos from the Fossilshell.

Across the street in front of the Royal saloon he saw the four saddle-horses from the Three Dot. Campion had ridden the racy-looking black, which was salty with dried sweat and looked leg-weary. Peace frowned slightly. He loved a good horse and he knew that Campion had given the black a grueling run to Tarp City and had left it in the chill winds of the street, instead of giving it a blanket and a stall in the livery-barn.

Peace and his two men had taken the trip easy and, in range parlance, had not laid a hair, but Peace had insisted on Hart and Horn stabling their horses for the night.

Peace met Sheriff Houston at the door of Carney's General Merchandise Store and shook hands with him. Houston was a portly man, middle-aged and serious of mien.

"Glad to see yuh, Peace," greeted the sheriff. "How's everythin' in the Chinook?"

"Kinda gettin' along," grinned Peace. "How's Tarp?"

"Well," Houston indicated the filled hitch-racks, with a flirt of his hand, "yuh can see that the census is about filled t'day. There's a few yet t' come from Chinook, but I reckon that most of Fossilshell is here a'ready."

"Good business for Tarp City," observed Peace.

"Yeah," grudgingly, "but —— bad business for the sheriff's office. Who owns that black race horse over there at the Royal rack, Peace?"

"Campion. That's his reg'lar mount, I reckon. Looks like a runnin' son-of-a-gun, don't it?"

"Uh-huh. What kind of a feller is Campion?"

"All right, I reckon."

"Which he ain't," declared Houston. "No man's all right that runs the tripe out of a blooded animal and leaves it out thataway."

"Mebbe he's just thoughtless," suggested Peace.

"Um-m-m, mebbe. Know anythin' about his gang?"

Peace shook his head.

"No. Yuh see, they don't mix with us much. Look like a bunch of top-hands, though, and it's their business if they want to be lonesome."

"Don't you never dislike anybody enough t' say somethin' against 'em, Peace River? You'd say somethin' good of the ——, wouldn't yuh?"

"Well," grinned Peace, "it wouldn't hurt me none and it might do him some good, don'tcha think? Yuh can't expect old Nick to ever do any good, with everybody down on him the way they are."

"All right, I pass," laughed Houston.

Barney McManus came out of the store and his wrinkled face broke into a smile at sight of Peace. Barney was one of the old Chinook Valley punchers, prematurely old in appearance, and filled with the belief that anything a cowpuncher did was the right thing.

"Ah-h-h!" grunted Barney. "The meanest man in the old Valley comes to visit us, does he?"

"Hello, you old bog-trotter," greeted Peace.

"Bog-trotter, eh? Is that all the respect ye have for the law, Peace Parker? Will ye answer me one question by yes or no?"

"Sure," grinned Peace.

"Well," Barney grinned expansively, "have ye quit rustlin' cattle for the Cross L?"

Peace looked at him blankly for a moment.

"I'll buy the drink, Barney."

"That makes five already today," chuckled Barney. "Nobody seems to want to incriminate themselves. Sure, it's a elegant question, but I've got to quit askin' it. When do we accept your kind offer?"

Houston nodded to Peace's unspoken question, and the three of them crossed toward the Royal saloon. Hart and Horn were coming down the street from the livery-stable and joined them at the saloon door.

The saloon was nearly filled with men and the games were all running full-blast. There were a number of cowpunchers from the Fossilshell at the bar, acting like a lot of kids just out of school. They fell upon Houston and insisted that the drinks were on Fossilshell. The boys from the Chinook were included in the invitation, but Gus Mehl, who had been drinking heavily, moved away from the bar.

One of the Fossilshell cowboys, evidently considering this an insult to their hospitality, said to Mehl—

"Pardner, that invite went to everybody at the bar."

Mehl laughed crookedly and shook his head. His face was flushed from liquor and his step was none too steady.

"Thasall right," he gulped. "I do'nt mind drinkin' with you Fossilshellers, but I ain't drinkin' with everybody."

"Meanin' us?" queried Bert Hart quickly, but Peace grasped Bert by the arm.

Mehl laughed mockingly. He was all primed for trouble, but hardly drunk enough to lose sight of the fact that the odds were against him.

"Meanin' what I mean," he replied slowly. "I drink with who I —— please; *sabe?*"

"Yo're plumb welcome," said Horn meaningly, shoving away from the bar, but the sheriff blocked him from Mehl.

"Wait a minute," begged the sheriff. "This ain't worth havin' trouble over, boys. If the gent from the Three Dot don't want to drink, he don't drink. But," he added meaningly, "the gent from the Three Dot might at least decline in a gentlemanly way."

Houston's manner amused Peace, who grinned widely.

"Funny, ain't it!" sneered Mehl drunkenly. "Yo're the notorious Peace River Parker, ain't yuh? Understand that they think yo're a little tin god around here. Well," Mehl braced himself carefully, "I want to tell yuh right now that us fellers from the Three Dot ain't worshipin' no tin gods. What do yuh think of that?"

"Well, I think yo're wise," grinned Peace.

"Yuh do, eh? Pullin' in yore horns. Blah! Somebody told me that you was a fighter. Huh! Somebody lied."

Mehl turned and lurched away toward a roulette table, swaggering drunkenly, bumping into every one who got in his way. The crowd at the bar turned back to their drinks, but Hart and Horn continued to glare at Mehl.

"Let him alone," advised Peace. "He's drunk and ain't responsible."

But Mehl was not through yet. Campion was at the poker table and Mehl caught sight of him.

"Hey, Frank!"

Mehl's voice was pitched high enough to be heard above the roar of conversation.

"I curried the he-buzzard of Chinook. Made Peace Parker swaller his talk, y'betcha. I betcha he'll be good, or I'll ride him agin'."

Many of the crowd looked toward the bar, but Peace did not even look at Mehl. Bert Hart fidgeted around, casting imploring glances toward Peace, who continued to talk with the sheriff. Barney nudged in closer and whispered to Peace—

"Wait'll the sheriff sneaks home, and then yuh can have plenty of room to put a sharp point on that jasper's head."

Peace grinned and turned away from the bar. Mehl was still crowing loud enough for every one to hear. Bender was bucking the faro game and Erne was playing roulette, but neither of them was paying any attention to Mehl.

"Well, I reckon I'll have to leave yuh," observed Peace, "I've gotta get me a pair of boots and some overalls before the store closes."

"Aw-w, shucks!" exploded Horn. "That

hombre will think he run yuh out of Tarp City, Peace."

"Well," grinned Peace, "it won't hurt me none and it may do him some good. You and Bert keep half-way sober. It looks like there might be storm and strife around here before long and you'll be danged well off if yuh ain't mixed into it."

"Sure, we'll be meek like two lambs," agreed Horn.

Peace turned and walked out of the door. Mehl saw him go and a drunken grin wreathed his lips. He thought he had run Peace Parker out of the saloon. But he was not content. His one-idea brain pictured more honors to come; so he lurched through the crowd and followed Peace, who crossed the street and went into a general store.

Bert Hart saw Mehl leave the room and motioned Horn to follow. Campion was watching Mehl, and when Hart and Horn started for the door, Campion drew out of the game and came out behind them. Mehl lurched across the wooden sidewalk and in through the open door.

The two cowpunchers stopped just outside the saloon door, as did Frank Campion. They watched him closely, but he paid them no heed.

Suddenly the door of the store banged open and out came Peace Parker with Mehl in his arms. He walked deliberately to the edge of the sidewalk and cast Mehl into the street where he rolled over and over. Then he tossed Mehl's gun into the dust, adjusted his own belt, turned his back and walked into the store.

Mehl got to his feet, staggered a circle and looked back at the store. Twice he tried before he could pick up his gun and then he came back toward the saloon. Both of his eyes were assuming a mauve tint and he seemed rather at a loss to know what had happened.

He halted at the edge of the sidewalk, looked back and then at Campion.

"Di'zuh see it?" he demanded.

"You are a —— fool, Mehl!" declared Campion.

"Oh, tha' was it, eh?"

Mehl blinked owlishly through his swollen eyes and began to pity himself. Whisky tears started and he became very indignant.

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Campion. "You're partly to blame, but he had no right to hit you when you were drunk."

"Is—that—so?" drawled Hart. "Kinda looks to me like Peace Parker held off a —— long time. If it had been me I'd 'a' popped him ten minutes ago. He was lookin' for it."

"Is this any of your business?" demanded Campion.

"We kinda act thataway, don't we?"

Campion did not seem to have a ready reply; so he herded Mehl inside the saloon, while the two cowboys grinned gleefully and slapped each other on the back.

"Let's go back and have another snifter," invited Hart. "It's worth a drink to see old Peace hoodle that bad jasper out of the store. Whoo-ee! Mehl lit settin' down and about tomorrow he'll be ridin' with short stirrups."

THEY went back to the bar, but did not neglect to see what was going on. Campion had gone to the roulette layout and was talking earnestly to Erne. He turned from there and strolled over to the faro table where he stopped long enough to speak to Bender.

Bender listened closely, glanced around the room and nodded. Mehl had sat down near the poker table and was holding his head in his hands. The sheriff had left the saloon, and was, no doubt, on his way home, but Barney McManus had anchored himself into a poker game and proceeded to forget that he represented the law of Tarp City.

The two cowpunchers leaned back against the bar and watched developments. Bender cashed in his chips and joined Erne who also quit playing. They came over to the bar and had a drink, but neither of them even looked at the two from the Cross L.

"We better stable our broncs," said Bender quietly. "No use leavin' 'em out there at a hitch-rack."

Erne nodded and they went out of the door. Campion was watching the poker game and did not look up as his two men left the place, but the Cross L boys followed them outside and watched them lead their horses down the street toward the livery-stable.

There was nothing about their actions to excite the suspicions of any one, but Jim Horn was not satisfied that everything was all right.

"I dunno," declared Jim. "Campion never took the trouble to go around whisperin' to them jaspers to go and put their broncs in the stable."

"Aw, I reckon it's all right," replied Bert. "Mebbe they ain't got sense enough to do it without bein' told. Let's go back and enjoy the fullness of the season."

Peace Parker completed his purchases, talked a few minutes with Bill Carney and decided to go back to the Cross L. He gave little thought to his trouble with Mehl, blaming most of it to liquor, and sorry that he was forced to knock Mehl down and throw him out of the store; but Mehl was trying to draw a gun.

"I wouldn't never monkey with them kinda people," declared Carney. "You didn't learn him nothin', Peace. My motter is to hit 'em so —— hard on the head that it'll bust the arches of their feet."

"He was just drunk, Bill," protested Peace.

"Thasso? Lemme tell yuh, pardner, that a man's disposition only shows when he's drunk. That jasper's a trouble hunter, but when he's sober he ain't got the nerve. You watch him."

"All right, Bill." Peace laughed and picked up his bundles. "See yuh later."

As Peace crossed the street toward the hitch-rack he saw Campion come out of the Royal and also start for the rack. He was paying no attention to Peace. His black horse was at the nearer rack, but he passed it and went on toward where Peace's horse was tied.

Peace expected Campion to continue on up the street, but he stopped at the rack and waited for Peace to arrive. At this moment Bender and Erne came from the rear of the feed store and approached the sidewalk beyond the hitch-rack.

Peace nodded to Campion and began fastening his purchases to his saddle. Bender and Erne came in closer and stopped near Campion.

"Didja want to see me for somethin'?" asked Peace, turning his head toward Campion.

"Yeah," Campion nodded quickly. "I just wanted to know what was the trouble between you and Gus Mehl."

"Oh!" Peace finished tying his bundles and turned.

"Why, I dunno exactly what was the trouble, Campion."

"That's what I thought. I don't suppose you stopped to think that Mehl was drunk, did you?"

"Yeah, I know he's drunk."

"Well, I want you to understand that I'm not drunk."

"No-o-o, I wouldn't say that yuh was—but yuh ain't far from it."

Peace grinned widely at Bender and Erne, but only received black looks for his trouble.

"Is that so?"

Campion's face grew tense and the muscles twitched around his eyes.

"Now, let's be reasonable," urged Peace softly. "Yo're all warmed up over somethin', and I can't see no reason for us havin' trouble. Mehl got drunk and tried to abuse me. I got away from him, but he follered me and tried to draw his gun. I'd 'a' been justified in pluggin' him, but he was too slow with his gun; so I just knocked him loose from the floor and threw him out."

"You're so —— fast yourself, I suppose?"

"No, I don't claim to bust no records, Campion."

Peace turned to his horse and prepared to mount, but Campion was not through yet. He moved in closer.

"You know what I think of anybody that'll hit a drunk man?" he asked.

Peace turned and looked closely at the three men.

"Campion," Peace spoke softly and without a trace of nervousness. "I don't want trouble with you. You're brought two of your men with you to see that yuh don't get hurt, and that kinda puts me in a bad hole.

"I ain't got no quarrel with you. I didn't want to hurt yore cowboy, but he insisted on it. Now, let it go as it lays."

Campion laughed sarcastically.

"I looked for you to say that, Parker. You've got a —— of a big reputation around here, but you ain't got the guts to protect it. We've heard that you are a fighter, but this part of the country must be awful shy on fighting material to speak of you that way."

"I s'pose," nodded Peace and turned back.

He was trying his best to avoid trouble, but Campion was in no mood to be pacified. He felt that Peace was afraid of trouble, and it made him more abusive. Campion had drunk just enough to make him reckless of words.

"You suppose, do you?" sneered Campion. "You're a four-flusher, Parker. These two men of mine have nothing to do with this, if that's holding you back. I think you are a big-mouthed quitter, and I've a —— good notion to——"

"With your gun or your hands?" Peace turned quickly, a wide grin on his face, but his eyes were not smiling.

Campion jerked back slightly. He had not expected Peace to accept his challenge, and now that it was put directly up to him, he hardly knew what to say.

Peace shook his head.

"Campion, you don't want trouble with me. You think it over for a while and you'll see just how foolish yo're actin'."

For a moment Campion only stared at him and Peace turned to reach for the tie-rope, but a wave of anger flashed across Campion's face and he stepped in closer, grasping Peace by the arm, as though to whirl him around.

And if that was Campion's intention, the results far exceeded his expectations, because Peace turned like a flash and his right fist caught Campion square in the face. The blow struck too high for a knock-out, but it sent Campion off his feet and he went down on the back of his neck in the dust.

The action had been so sudden that Bender and Erne had no time to assist Campion, and Peace was facing them, smiling easily, his right hand swinging near the butt of his holstered gun.

Campion struggled to his feet and stood there in sort of a daze, looking at the man who had hit him, but making no further effort to continue the battle. Bert Hart and Jim Horn were hurrying from the Royal, and several men were crossing from the opposite side of the street.

There was nothing dapper looking about Campion now. The bridge of his nose was skinned badly and one eye was fast swelling shut. He was still dazed from the blow, but fully realized what had happened and his face was white with hate against the man who had knocked him down.

Suddenly his right hand flashed toward the butt of his gun. It was an unlooked for action on the part of every one, except Peace Parker, whose hand jerked upward from his side and he shot directly from his hip.

Campion jerked sideways and his gun thudded into the dust. Whether through accident or design, Peace's bullet had smashed into the curving butt of Campion's gun, splintering the bone handle and cutting Campion's fingers badly.

Bender and Erne made no move, as Campion looked down at his crippled hand and cursed wickedly. Jim Horn was standing directly behind Bender and Erne, waiting for either of them to make a hostile move. Erne glanced back at him, turned on his heel and went back toward the saloon, with Bender following him.

There was an awkward silence for several moments and Campion picked up his hat, dusted it off against his knee, his face a mixture of anger and chagrin. Then he walked to the hitch-rack, mounted his horse and rode away.

Bender and Erne watched him from the saloon door, and, in a few moments, went toward the livery-stable. Campion was heading straight toward the Poncho Pass road.

Peace shook his head at the crowd, which volleyed him with questions as to the why and wherefore of this trouble.

"Just foolishness," said Peace, but Bert and Jim led him away from the crowd.

"It was a frame-up," declared Jim. "We seen Campion whisper to Bender and Erne, and then they took their horses to the livery-stable—or said they was goin' to and we seen 'em go down there.

"We didn't see Campion go out, and Bender and Erne didn't come back. A little later I looked out back of the Royal, and there was two of them Three Dot horses tied to that old corral fence. They'd made a bluff to stable 'em, but circled back and tied to the fence. Me and Bert fogged out to the street just in time to see yuh swat Mr. Campion."

"Well, I dunno what they want to frame up on me for," grinned Peace. "I never done nothin' to them."

"Don't make no never mind," Jim shook his head. "It was all framed, Peace."

"Wait a minute," said Bert, and bow-legged his way to the rear of the feed store.

He came back in a minute and grinned wonderingly.

"Both broncs are gone. I'll betcha that all three of them jaspers has headed for home."

Peace grinned thoughtfully, as he walked back to his horse and swung into the saddle.

"We'll be home by Monday mornin'," assured Jim.

Peace nodded and rode away slowly. It was a long, hard ride to the Cross L, but Peace was in no hurry. Ahead of him was Campion, Bender and Erne, somewhere along the high grades of Poncho Pass.

"They knew I was ready to go home," reflected Peace, "and them pullin' out of town thataway don't look good to me a-tall. Cowpunchers don't leave a saloon on pay-day without a danged good reason. Mebbe they're lookin' for me."

THE sun was setting behind the V-shaped notch of Poncho Pass and the graded road was already plunged into the shadows of evening, when Peace drew rein and scanned the country about him.

To the left was a rocky, brush-covered hog-back ridge, which broke sharply against the cliffs beyond. There was little footing for a horse and no sign of a trail, but Peace urged his horse off the road and up this ridge.

Twisting in and out of the brush, he gradually climbed until the road was far below him. Then he swung to the left through a rocky swale and along the north side of a rock-bound cañon.

There he picked up what might have been an old, old trail, which led down across the cañon and angled up the other side among the barren rocks. A bevy of blue-grouse whirred up about him, came to roost in the branches of a stunted pine and craned their necks curiously at him.

A little beyond there a mule-deer crossed the ridge ahead of him, stopped and looked him over curiously. Then it whistled and bounded heavily down the hill, disappearing in the trees.

Peace was following the marks of the old trail now, paying no attention to the back trail. This was the one secret way into the Valley of the Chinook and was only known to a few men, who guarded the secret well.

He came at last to the beetling crags which marked the timber-line, and the trail led him down over the lip of another narrow cleft, where he angled his way to the slope of the valley side. It was not a difficult pass, but no one would ever look for it at that part of the range. Those who knew of it only used it at rare times and were careful not to follow exactly the same route, except through the very pass itself.

It was fast growing dark when Peace started down the rocky slope that led to the foothills of the valley. Below him the valley seemed a huge, mystic bowl, rimmed with a jagged edge which was high-lighted with the gold of sunset.

Slowly he descended into the purple shadows. About a mile further down he came to the beginning of a well-beaten trail, where the cattle had cut deeply into the ground on their way to water.

He rode beside this trail, where his horse's tracks would not show in the dust. It was a long way from the secret pass, but Peace did not want his horse's track even to show up there.

He drew rein beside the trail and looked back up the dim slopes behind him. He could see only a short distance, but he had a vague feeling that something was behind him. He grinned at his own foolish imagination and began to manufacture a cigaret.

He hesitated about scratching a match. Suddenly he heard a sound. It was like the click of a shod hoof on stone. Quickly he turned away from the trail and rode further back into the jack-pine thicket, where he stopped to listen. The sound was not repeated. Unluckily he had moved too far back to catch a view of the trail.

Once he thought he heard the jingle of a bit-chain, but decided that it was his imagination. He waited for perhaps ten minutes before going back to the trail. There he dismounted, lighted his cigaret and held the match close to the dusty trail.

He examined it closely for a few moments, pinched out the match and swung back into his saddle. In the trail was the well-defined track of a horse, heading down into the valley, and the track showed that the horse was shod with thin shoes—almost as light as racing-plates.

"Campion followed me through," reflected Peace wonderingly. "He must 'a' swung in behind me and watched me leave the road."

Far down in the valley an owl hooted dismally, and from the timber-line a coyote seemed to answer with a wailing howl. Peace ground the lighted end of his cigaret against the leg of his chaps, settled himself in his saddle and went slowly down the trail toward the Cross L.

SUNDAY was a dull day at the Cross L. Peace slept late and was only awakened by the sound of a wagon leaving the ranch, as Cross L Marshall took Jess to church at Pasiooks.

It was an ordeal for Cross L, this Sunday pilgrimage to the little church; an hour or so

of misery, while he listened to the denunciation of sin, which the minister seemed to point directly to him. Cross L hated to *have* to do anything, and hoped for the day when Jess might have a man to take her to church, and let her tired old dad sleep late and loaf around the house in his slippers, instead of going to church in a pair of creaking, palpably new Sunday boots and a suit of black, uncomfortable clothes.

He usually salved his outraged feelings thus—

"I ante a certain amount in this here church game every year and I reckon I've got to play out the hand.

"The preacher says that yuh can't go to heaven unless you're a Christian, don't he? He sure hammers it into us and I kinda feel uplifted when I leave the church, but it don't stay with me longer than supper-time. I've either got to die between noon and six o'clock on a Sunday, or I ain't got a chance in the hereafter."

They had often urged Peace to attend church with them, but he shook his head.

"I'm like a Injun," he explained. "I know that there's a Big Spirit somewhere—somethin' that keeps us tickin' along. Somehow I can't look up at the sky and figure that the Big Spirit is up there any more than it's down here, and as far as there bein' a punishment for sin after death, I can't see what's the use of it.

"It's like tryin' to scare a kid by tellin' him goblin stories. I reckon that the Big Spirit made us intelligent critters, and He never meant us to be scared to die. No sir! I never did believe in threatin' folks, and I don't reckon that the Big Spirit ever intended for us to scare anybody into bein' good. I don't need no preacher to tell me right from wrong, and if I do wrong I'll get all my hell right here, y'betcha."

"Saleratus" Smith, the cook of the Cross L, disliked church for the simple reason that he had to get an early breakfast for Jess and her father. Saleratus was an old chuck-wagon cook before he took over the culinary duties of the Cross L. But Saleratus could cook. Rheumatism had unfitted him for anything except kitchen work and had caused his soul to sour against everything and everybody. He rolled voluminous cigarets out of wrapping-paper and plug-cut tobacco of great strength; cigarets that were forever coming unwrapped and spilling their contents in a smoking mass. And, in case they did burn to a successful end, they scorched his scraggly mustache and caused him to emit a flow of profanity that only a lifetime on the ranges could have acquired.

Jim and Bert did not come back to the ranch until early Monday morning, and they had little taste for breakfast. They were sadder, but no wiser than when they left on Saturday. Tarp City had their month's salary, but that was as usual and no more than they expected.

Peace was saddling his horse at the corral, and Jim and Bert were arguing in the kitchen with Saleratus, when Blackie Erne rode in and tied his horse to a corner of the porch.

Cross L Marshall was sitting on the porch and merely grunted as Erne climbed the steps and came up to him. Jim Horn looked out of the kitchen door and watched Erne leave his horse. He motioned to Bert to come out.

The horse, a Roman-nosed buckskin, had swung around until its body was hidden from those on the porch, and Jim Horn grinned gleefully as he picked up a few feet of baling-wire and motioned frantically to Bert.

Old Cross L looked quizzically at Erne, waiting for him to make known his mission.

"Is Miss Marshall to home?" asked Erne.

"I hope she is," grunted Marshall. "Ain't seen her this mornin', so I'd say she was still in bed."

Erne reached in his pocket and drew out an envelop, which he tendered to Marshall.

"Will yuh see that she gets this here note?"

Marshall squinted at the unsealed envelop, turning it over and over in his hands.

"I reckon I will," he nodded slowly. "Ain't nobody been took sick nor nothin' like that, has there?"

Erne squinted back at him and shook his head, as he said:

"Not yet. Much obliged."

"Uh-huh."

Erne went back to his horse and swung into the saddle. He whistled unmusically between his teeth, as if glad that his mission was over. The buckskin jerked around nervously and from its hind legs came a metallic sound.

Erne turned to look back as the horse buck-jumped quickly, and caught a flash of a large tin-can hanging to the buckskin's tail. Came the *tunkl* as it struck the horse's heels, and Mr. Erne began riding high and

handsome in order not to part from his saddle.

Down past the corral and out of the gate went the buckskin, bucking and bawling in a cloud of dust, while Jim Horn hugged Saleratus hysterically and Bert Hart sat down on the ground, howling with unholy mirth.

Marshall watched the unceremonious leaving of Blackie Erne and walked to the side of the porch, where he could look back at the three at the kitchen door. Marshall did not know just what was the matter with the horse, but he did know that Jim and Bert were responsible. Peace stopped saddling long enough to watch Erne disappear in a cloud of dust, shook his head sadly over the misdeeds of his men and went back to his task.

Cross L Marshall smothered a grin and turned back, looking at the unsealed envelop. He cocked one ear toward the open door as if listening. Satisfied that Jess was nowhere in sight, he proceeded to show that he was entirely without shame.

Cautiously he perused the note several times. Then he put it carefully in his pocket, bit an enormous chew of tobacco off his plug and exploded an oath that would have galvanized a dead mule into life.

He squinted down toward the corral at Peace Parker who was looping up his lariat rope, and hesitated for a moment over just what to do, made his decision and clumped down the steps.

Peace turned to him as he approached.

"What did Erne want?" he asked.

Marshall spat explosively and handed Peace the envelop.

"Brought yuh a note," he mumbled.

"Me? Why didn't he bring it to me, Cross L?"

Marshall cleared his throat with difficulty, as Peace drew out the missive and scanned it.

MY DEAR JESSIE:

In a fit of anger, caused by jealousy, I think, Peace Parker took occasion to damage me to a certain extent, which accounts for my absence. But physical wounds heal quickly and I shall count the hours until I am presentable again.

Yours

FRANK.

P. S.—Please say nothing to Parker. I can appreciate his feelings in this matter. F.

Peace lifted his eyes and looked at Cross L who was still having throat trouble.

"Cross L, this note wasn't intended for me?"

"Huh! Wasn't intended for yuh? Then—lemme see it, Peace."

Peace folded it slowly and put it back into the envelope.

"That note is for Jess—not me."

"The —— it was! Well, I'll be darned! Huh!"

Cross L squinted at the note and up at Peace.

"Well, sir, I must be gittin' hard of hearin', Peace. I thought I distinctly heard that jasper say that it was for you. Yuh know, I wondered why he didn't give it to you. Huh! Well, I'll have to give it to Jess."

He walked swiftly back toward the house; anxious to get out of range of Peace Parker's accusing eyes. Marshall was not a gifted liar. Peace looked after him, a queer expression in his eyes. A smile flitted across his wide lips and he shook his head slowly.

"Cross L, yo're an awful poor liar," he reflected, "but yuh mean mighty well."

Jess had come out on the porch and met her father, who handed her the envelope.

"Mister Erne brought it for yuh, Jess."

He bit off a fresh chew and scratched his shoulders against a porch-post, while Jess read the missive, a slight frown between her eyes.

"Ain't nobody sick, are they, Jess?" he asked seriously, but avoiding her eyes.

"No, I don't think so."

"I was just wonderin'."

Cross L sat down on the porch and rubbed his hands on his thighs nervously.

"I was just wonderin' why that Erne feller come here. I don't like him, Jess. He ain't bringin' yuh poetry, is he?"

"Poetry?"

Jess laughed shortly and shook her head.

"Tha'sall right then, Jess. I ain't got a bit of use for them poets. Fellers—" He reflected a moment— "Fellers that vas-leen their hair—might write poetry."

Jess studied the back of his head for a while, and then—

"Dad, why do you dislike Frank Campion?"

"Dislike him? I never said I did."

"But you do dislike him?"

"No, I don't dislike him, Jess. That word's too soft. I hate him to beat ——!"

"Why?" softly.

"Why!"

Cross L got to his feet and tried to glare at Jess.

"Yes, why, dad?"

"Cause I don't like him and 'cause he's a —— liar and—and everythin'."

"Why do you call him a liar? Did he lie to you?"

Cross L began to have throat trouble again. He felt that Jess knew he had read that note. He walked to the corner of the porch and proceeded to cough rackingly. When he turned, his eyes were filled with tears from his efforts and his voice was husky.

"Gotta do somethin' for my cold," he told her. "Be in m' grave, if I don't. Must 'a' set in a draft. Cough m' fool head off once in a while."

"Especially when you don't want to answer a question, dad."

"What question?" Cross L fairly bristled, but started for the steps. "What's questions got to do with runnin' a cattle-ranch, I'd admire t' know. Think I'm goin' t' stand around and let m' business go to rack and ruin, just 'cause a fool woman wants t' ask questions? Huh!"

He humped his head between his shoulders and headed for the corral, where Jim and Bert were leaning on the fence, still laughing over what they had done to Erne.

"Didja see what happened to that Erne feller?" asked Jim, still chuckling.

"What did yuh do to him?" asked Cross L.

"Tied a tin-can to his bronc's tail. Man, man, but didn't that animal respond to treatment. Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Cross L glared at them and masticated violently.

"That's a —— of a thing to do! Do I have t' muzzle you pelicans to make visitin' safe at this ranch? That was a danged mean thing t' do, and I don't want t' see yuh do it ag'in; *sabe?*"

"All right," said Jim seriously, "yuh won't. And yuh won't have to muzzle us either, old timer. There's other ranches where they hire cow-hands."

"M'yah!" grunted Cross L explosively, and then to Peace—

"Tell me about that scrap yuh had with Campion."

Peace shook his head slowly—

"No, it ain't worth tellin'."

"Like —— it ain't!" snorted Jim, and proceeded to tell the whole story in detail, while old Cross L masticated thoughtfully and squinted at him.

"Shot the gun out of his hand, eh? Knocked him upside down and then busted his gun-hand."

"Well, my gosh, he had to do it!" yowled Jim.

"Didn't have t' shoot him in the hand, did he?"

"Well, he had to stop him."

"Was he runnin' on his hands?"

"Aw, you make me sick!"

"Yeah, and you fellers make me sick," retorted Cross L. "Shoot 'em in the hands! ——'s delight! What's a man got a body for, if it ain't t' shoot at? Yuh make me sick, takin' a chance on shootin' at his hands!"

Cross L spat viciously and glared at Jim Horn.

"How long do yuh reckon that tin can'll stay on that bronc's tail, Jim?"

"Quite some period," declared Jim. "It was put on with twisted balin'-wire."

"That's," Cross L squinted down the road, "that's what I call bein' thorough. But if yuh ever try it on that black race horse."

He glared wickedly for a moment and then a smile wrinkled his face.

"Be careful. I'll betcha that bronc could kick a fly out of a gallon can of axle grease and never spot his hoof."

Cross L grunted softly to himself, tightened up his belt and went back toward the house. The three cowpunchers looked at each other and grinned widely.

"My ——, but old Cross L is plumb human!" exclaimed Jim Horn. "He's reg'lar home folks."

Which was not a compliment, but a statement of fact.

THREE days passed without anything happening, except the usual routine of the cattle-ranch. None of the Three Dot outfit came to the Cross L. Peace and the other two punchers were busy moving a bunch of Herefords from the Bar X Bar and throwing them back into the ranges nearer the pass, but they saw nothing of Campion nor his men.

Peace avoided the ranch-house as much as possible. He had been in the habit of spending his evenings in the living-room with Jess and her father, but now he played seven-up for mythical stakes with Jim and

Bert, or listened to Jim play an everlasting Spanish fandango on his guitar.

He had not changed in any way, except this. He did not sigh over his misfortunes. On the contrary, his smile seemed wider and he plunged into the ranch work with a will. Jess said nothing to her father, but she knew he missed Peace Parker at the interval between supper and bedtime.

But Cross L would not admit it except on the second night, when Peace did not join him he flung aside his newspaper at eight o'clock and got to his feet.

"—— any man that vas-leens his hair!" he exploded and clumped off to bed, talking in an undertone to himself.

On Thursday Gus Sinks rode in at the Cross L and met Peace at the barn. Gus was a thin, wiry, wry-necked sort of an individual with the face of a ferret. There was nothing good about Sinks. He was a gun-man, ex-horse-thief and several more things. But, for the first time in his life, he was shooting square with one man—Peace Parker.

"Hello, Gus," greeted Peace, shaking hands with him. "I been wonderin' when you'd come in. How's everythin'?"

"Aw right. I'd 'a' been in before this, but I couldn't find a honest man to leave with the sheep. I got a Basque herder, and he *sabes* enough United States to know that I'll massacree him if any of them ——ed animated underwears are missin' when I get back."

Peace laughed and shook his head.

"I dunno how yuh stand it out there, Gus. How's the feed?"

"Feed's fine. I dunno how I stand it either, Peace. The other day I got to thinkin' about it. I says to myself:

" 'Sinks, yo're a —— fool. Why don't yuh sell these lousy woollies and pull yore freight with the money. Nobody would be the wiser.'

"I could do it, too, Peace. There's buyers out there that don't care who owns the sheep. But—" Gus hooked one leg around his saddle-horn and drew out his tobacco and papers— "but I jist shut my eyes and remembered back to that night in Tarp City, when they had the rope all ready for my neck, and you stepped in and claimed that my life belonged to you. I'll betcha—" Gus shut his eyes tight for a moment— "I'll betcha I don't forget that, Peace."

"Well," Peace smiled softly, "mebbe they wouldn't 'a' hung yuh, Gus."

"The —— they wouldn't! I had it comin' to me, didn't I? Don'tcha try to fool yoreself, Peace; I know Tarp City."

"How are yuh fixed for money, Gus?"

"That's why I came in, Peace. I don't need no salary, but the grub's runnin' low."

"You've got to have some salary, too, Gus."

"Aw, I'll get along. You forgit the salary until yuh sell them sheep. All I need is grub money."

"Well, go right down to Pasiooks," declared Peace. "I've got money in the bank down there."

"Pasiooks, eh? I never seen that town. Have they got a bank down there?"

"Y'betcha. Yuh didn't think that the Chinookers packed their money to Tarp City, didja? Our bank is the richest little old bank in the state, if anybody asks yuh."

"Yeah? Oh, I'll betcha that's right, too. These cattlemen sure do make money over here."

Peace got his horse and they headed for Pasiooks which was five miles away. It could hardly be called a town. The one street was hardly a block long. There was the Pasiooks bank, general store, post-office and blacksmith shop on one side of the street, and on the other was a little restaurant, two saloons and a feed store.

On the east side of the settlement was the little frame school house and at the south end of the town was the church. The school house and the church had been painted within two years, but the rest of the buildings were unpainted, or had been painted but time had worn off the color.

There were several horses tied to the saloon hitchracks as Peace and Gus Sinks rode into the town, and as they dismounted in front of the bank, Frank Campion and Tiny Bender came out of a saloon and went out to their horses.

Sinks turned and watched them mount their horses. Frank had a little trouble with his black horse, which carried him over near the bank. He looked at Sinks and his brows drew together in a quick frown. Quickly he jerked the horse around and galloped off up the road after Bender. Sinks continued to look after him, and his face registered wonderment as he turned to Peace.

"Who's the fussy cowpuncher, Peace?"

"Feller by the name of Campion. Bought out the Three Dot outfit over here."

"Ye-e-eah?" Sinks seemed slightly amused. "Cow-man, eh?"

"Well, I dunno about his ability, but he owns the ranch."

"Well, that's kinda flossy," remarked Sinks. "Let's go and get the *dinero*."

As they entered the bank they met Chris Sorensen, the owner of the Bar X Bar. Chris was a big Norse cow-man with a mustache that looked like a pair of inverted buffalo horns, and the voice of a bull.

"H'lo, Peace," he boomed. "I was just goin' to ride out and see you. The boys just brought in some more of them white-faced cows and I was wonderin' if Cross L wanted any more of them. Look fine."

"All right," grinned Peace. "I'll ride back with yuh as soon as I get through with a little business."

Sorensen waited until Peace had drawn some money and paid it over to Sinks who seemed interested in the interior of the bank. Few strangers ever came to Pasiooks and Mark Clayton, the cashier, made a memory photograph of Gus Sinks.

They went outside and Gus mounted his horse.

"I'll see yuh ag'in in a couple of week, Peace. If yuh want to sell out there's plenty of buyers goin' through the Sun Prairie, but they don't offer much. If we get one more rain pretty soon we'll be all fixed and can thumb our nose at 'em. Whatcha think?"

"Well, I dunno," confessed Peace. "I don't want to give 'em away, Gus. Suppose we wait and take a chance, eh? If you don't mind stickin' out there."

Gus spat dryly.

"Aw, I'll stick. S'-long, Peace, and thanks for the *dinero*."

Peace waved at him and went to join Sorensen at the hitch-rack. He had had his doubts about Gus Sinks, and would not have seen surprised to know that Sinks had sold out the sheep and skipped the country, but since Sinks' confession of guilty thoughts he felt that his sheep were well protected.

Somehow he had the feeling that Gus Sinks and Frank Campion knew each other. He had seen the expression of Campion's face when he saw Sinks, and Sinks had shown too much interest for one stranger in another. But it was none of his business, he decided. It was a small world, and there was no reason why they shouldn't know each other.

He walked over to Sorensen, where they mounted and rode out the opposite end of town toward the Bar X Bar.

FIGURATIVELY speaking, Peace Parker exploded a bombshell under Cross L Marshall the following day. Jim and Bert had ridden toward the upper end of the valley and Peace and Cross L were sitting on the porch, looking over some figures that Peace had got on Bar X Bar yearlings.

Cross L had been arguing over the prices and swearing at Sorensen for being a pirate when he happened to notice that Peace was paying no attention. The big cowboy was staring off across the hills, his mind wandering far from the business at hand.

"When yuh come back we'll talk some more," said Cross L humorously.

"When I come back," repeated Peace slowly. "Yeah, that's it, Cross L."

"What's the matter with yuh, Peace?"

"Nothin'; I was just thinkin'."

"Yeah? But yuh wasn't thinkin' about white-faced cows."

"No-o-o—not about cows."

Peace turned and put his hand on Marshall's shoulder, a whimsical smile on his homely face.

"I'm goin' away, Cross L—goin' to take a trip."

Marshall eyed him closely, while he drew out his plug of tobacco and bit off a quarter-section.

"Thasso? How long will yuh be gone, Peace?"

Peace smiled and shook his head.

"I dunno. The Injuns used to say, 'When the wind blows out through Poncho Pass, who can say when that same wind will return?' "

"——!" exploded Marshall. "Yuh don't mean that yo're goin' for good!"

"For good?"—Peace rubbed his chin thoughtfully—"Mebbe. The only trip I ever had was to the penitentiary and I'd kinda like to see somethin' beyond the hills."

"Uh-huh," Cross L squinted narrowly into space. "To see somethin' beyond the hills, Peace. Yuh know, I was thataway once. I wanted t' see the other side of the hill. But I'm old now, and I don't care what's over there. Right now and right here is all that interests me."

"You ain't old, Cross L."

"Mebbe not, Peace. I'm sixty. And when yo're sixty yuh don't climb hills just to look over the other side."

For several minutes they sat silent, each busy with his own thoughts. Then:

"I always wished I had a son," said Cross L slowly. "Our first baby was a girl and she died when she was a little thing. Then Jess came along. Her mother didn't live long after that, Peace.

"I had t'raise Jess m'self, and I reckon I made a —— of a mess of it. She ain't got the sense that the Lord gave geese in Ireland. If she was a boy I could cuss him out and hammer some sense into him—but she ain't no boy."

"Jess," said Peace softly, "Jess is a wonderful girl."

"M'yah!" Thoughtfully. "Didja tell her yuh was goin' away, Peace?"

"No-o-o. Yuh see I just made up my mind."

"Uh-huh. When yuh goin', Peace?"

"Tomorrow, I reckon. I'll go to Sun Prairie and sell out them sheep and then I reckon I'll go down into Arizona. I ain't made up my mind just where I'll go."

"Uh-huh," Cross L got slowly to his feet and sighed deeply. "I—I hope yuh have luck, Peace Parker. We'll be kinda thinkin' about yuh and wonderin'—I s'pose."

"I'll write to yuh, Cross L."

"Yeah, I s'pose so."

Cross L reached for his plug of tobacco, but his hand stopped short of his pocket.

A man was riding swiftly in through the ranch gate and coming toward them, while several other men, who had been with him, kept on up the main road, heading toward the upper end of the valley.

The rider jerked to a stop near the porch and dropped to the ground. It was Perry Hazelton, the blacksmith from Pasiooks. He dropped his reins and trotted up the steps.

"The Pasiooks bank has been robbed!" he panted, as he pointed up the road, where a cloud of dust still hung.

"Some of the boys have headed for the Pass, but he's likely got away by this time."

"Pasiooks bank!" exclaimed Cross L. "Who done it?"

"Whew! I'm all out of wind!" puffed Hazelton, "I reckon I worked harder than the horse did. We don't know who done the job. It was about an hour ago, I think.

"There wasn't nobody in the bank, except Clayton, when I went in and found him. He'd been hit over the head with somethin', and was layin' half-in and half-out of the vault. There was loose money scattered all over the floor.

"I yelled for help and we got Clayton on to a cot. He kinda roused up long enough to tell us that he'd been robbed by one man. We turned him over to Doctor Glover and then went huntin' for the robber. If he ain't made his getaway straight for the Pass he's still here in the valley."

"How much money did he get?" asked Cross L.

"We dunno. From the looks of things he's got a lot."

"I've expected this," said Cross L quickly. "Yuh see, this bank belongs to us cowmen. We're a queer lot, I guess. We didn't trust the banks at Tarp City; so we started one of our own.

"We didn't do a regular bankin' business —much. It was more of a place to store money. And like a lot of fools we didn't think that anybody would bother it."

"Must 'a' been a lot of money in there," observed Hazelton.

"A lot? I dunno how much, but about all the money there is in Chinook Valley, except what's wearin' a hide and runnin' around on four legs."

"It probably won't take Clayton long to find out how much is gone," stated Peace. "Let's go down there."

"One of the boys will ride to Tarp City and tell the sheriff," said Hazelton as they went after the horses. "There was Dud Le Page, Baldy Hyatt, Jud Smith and Campion."

"Where did you find Campion?" asked Cross L.

"At the Three Dot. There wasn't no use of everybody goin' to the Pass; so he sent his three punchers to town to help search the South end."

Pasiooks was a busy little place when they rode in. Bad news travels swiftly, and the robbery of the bank was mighty bad news to the Valley of the Chinook. Several groups of cowboys had already left town, searching for a sight of the robber.

Clayton, his head swathed in bandages, was in the bank, trying to check up the extent of the loss while several cattlemen stood around and annoyed him with questions.

Peace and Cross L Marshall came in and joined the group. Clayton looked up at them. His face was very white and his eyes showed that he was suffering from a raging headache.

"H'lo, Clayton," said Cross L. "How are yuh feelin'?"

"Not very good," faltered Clayton. "My head is all wrong for figures right now."

He sat down in a chair and held his head in his hands.

"Any idea how much money he got?" asked one of the men.

"About all there was in the vault," groaned Clayton. "I'd hate to even make a guess. Of course it will all check up."

"About how much?" queried Marshal anxiously.

"Well," Clayton lifted his head, "there was thirty thousand in currency in one box. I don't know how much gold there was, but it was about ten thousand dollars."

The cattlemen looked at each other seriously. It meant that they were about cleaned out. It was their own institution—their loss.

"It was a foolish idea," said Clayton heavily. "We should have invested this money. But—well, there's no wisdom in hoarding money, gentlemen."

"That's a cinch—now," said one of the men bitterly.

"Any idea who done it?" queried Peace.

Clayton squinted painfully at Peace and nodded slowly.

"Yes, I know who did it, Parker."

"Yuh do?" exploded Cross L. "Who was it, Clayton?"

Clayton rubbed his aching head.

"I don't know his name, Marshall. It was the man that came here yesterday with Peace Parker."

Peace stared at Clayton and around at the cattlemen, who were watching him, wondering what it meant. Peace went to Clayton and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Clayton, are yuh sure of that?"

"Just as sure as the world, Parker. I noticed that he was looking the place over yesterday."

"But he was masked, wasn't he?" queried Cross L.

Clayton nodded.

"Yes, he was masked, but that was no disguise. He was wearing an old yellow velvet vest, a gray sombrero and a wide cartridge-belt which was studded with brass rivets. I even recognized his boots with the stitched tops."

Peace turned away and stared across the room. He knew that it had been Gus Sinks. Gus was square with him, but he was still a thief. Peace turned and looked at Cross L.

"It was Gus Sinks. I brought him here yesterday to give him some money, Cross L. He rode North when I went to the Bar X Bar with Sorensen."

"Does that description cover him, Peace?" asked one of the men.

Peace nodded.

"Yes, that covers him." Then to Clayton—"Tell us how he done it, Clayton."

Clayton squinted painfully and pointed toward the open door of the vault.

"I had the vault open and was just coming out with some papers, when I happened to look up. I didn't hear this man come in but there he stood, just inside the railing with his gun pointed at me.

"I couldn't hardly realize what it was all about. Then he motioned for me to turn around and go into the vault. I had to do it, gentlemen. He stepped in behind me and held a gun against my back while I unlocked the strong-boxes.

"Yes, he ordered me to do it. Then he must have hit me over the head with his gun."

Clayton rubbed his hand tenderly over his bandages.

"I don't know how long I was unconscious, but when I woke up he was gone.

"I was so weak I couldn't stand up; so I crawled half out of the vault, when Hazelton discovered me. I think the robber intended to lock me in the vault, because the bolts were thrown. In his haste to escape, he accidentally threw the bolts and was unable to shut the door."

Peace went over to the vault door. The bolts were still blocking it. He examined it closely.

One of the cattlemen laughed shortly. "Lookin' for finger-prints, Peace?"

Peace smiled grimly and shook his head.

"Wouldn't do us any good, Pierce."

"You wouldn't find any," said Clayton. "He wore gloves."

"Well," observed Cross L hopefully, "if he didn't get to the Pass ahead of the boys, he's bottled up in the valley."

"Plenty of places to hide," declared Peace. "He can take his time and get away. What we've got to do is to curry

this old valley until a chipmunk couldn't get away."

As they started out of the door, Hazelton met them at the door, and with him was a ten-year-old boy.

"Say, this kid seen him!" blurted Hazelton. "He seen that robber after he got the money."

"Where was he?" asked Cross L.

"Well, I seen a man, but I dunno whether he was the one," said the boy. "This'n had his horse tied just the other side of the school house. I seen him get on his horse and he had a big bundle in his arms."

"What did he look like?" asked Peace.

"I don't just remember," confessed the boy, "but I know he had on a gray hat and a fancy belt. I seen the sun sparkle on that belt. And he had a sorrel horse that single-footed."

Peace nodded to the men.

"That's the horse."

"Was the man wearin' a mask, Buddy?" queried Cross L.

"No. I wasn't close enough to see his face, but he didn't have no mask on that I could see."

"He'd take it off right away," said one of the men. "He likely slipped it on when he went in and slipped it off as soon as he got outside."

"Didja notice which way he went, Buddy?" asked Peace.

"He went up the valley, but he didn't seem to go in a hurry. Just kinda single-footed along."

"He's a smart son-of-a-gun," admitted Cross L. "Didn't do anythin' to attract attention. Likely went —— for-leather as soon as he got out of sight. Prob'ly twisted off the road and circled into the hills. Mebbe the boys'll beat him to the Pass. If they don't—we're about half-out of money around here."

"Half-out, ——!" snorted Billy Pierce, who owned the Crescent outfit. "If they don't nail him, I won't have money enough to pay my two punchers a month's salary. I might have to sell a cow or two to make a payday."

"You'd have a —— of a time sellin' one to me," said Cross L sadly. "I might be able to trade, but I couldn't buy the hole in a doughnut."

"I reckon that about covers us all," said another.

"It's a hard old world, and few of us ever get out of it alive," observed Peace seriously. "I feel that I'm partly to blame. I brought Gus Sinks here with me. Why, he didn't even know we had a bank here."

The cattleman smiled grimly. Peace remembered that he had told Gus Sinks that the Pasiooks bank was the richest little bank in the state and that Sinks had seemed interested in that fact.

He and Cross L stood around awhile and listened to arguments, pro and con, which arrived at nothing. Then they got their horses and headed for the Cross L ranch. There was nothing they could do just now.

"You'll have to hire somebody to take your sheep," observed Cross L as they rode home, "or will yuh go out and sell 'em, like yuh intended to do?"

"I dunno, Cross L," Peace shook his head. "It kinda hurts me to think that Gus Sinks done this job to us folks. He's an ignorant son-of-a-gun and he don't know any better than to do wrong most of the time, but I trusted him—kinda."

"In God we trust," quoted Cross L. "That's the only safe thing to do."

Marshall went straight to Jess with the news of the robbery, but Peace did not go up to the house with him.

"We had fifteen thousand dollars in that bank, Jess," he added, after he had explained the robbery. "It kinda crimps us."

"But they will catch the robber, won't they?" she asked.

"I'm hopin' fifteen thousand dollars worth, Jess. He had a fair start, but he might 'a' circled far enough to let the boys beat him to the Pass."

"Who went up there?"

"Le Page, Hyatt, Jud Smith and Frank Campion."

Jess nodded thoughtfully.

"I reckon I forgot to tell yuh that Peace is leavin' us, Jess," said Marshall slowly.

She looked up quickly at him—

"Leaving us?"

Marshall nodded.

"Yeah."

"What for, Dad?"

"Well," Marshall squinted thoughtfully, "well, he said he kinda wanted t' see what's on the other side of the hill. Mebbe he's tired of the valley, Jess."

She walked to the door and stared across the hills.

"I don't blame him," continued Marshall. "Sometimes a feller does kinda itch to see

the other side of the hill. Says he's goin' down into Arizona. He ain't much of a hand to write letters; so we won't likely hear from him. I'm kinda glad t' see him go, m'self."

Cross L picked up his hat and walked quietly out through the kitchen, leaving Jess still staring out of the door. He went out through the rear entrance, slapped his hat on his head and grinned wickedly.

"I'll betcha that'll hold her for a while," he chuckled and went down to the barn to find something to swear at.

It was after dark that night when Sheriff Houston and Barnery McManus stopped at the Cross L on their way to Pasiooks. They had ridden straight in from Tarp City, but had left the Pass guarded.

"Gus Sinks, eh?" grunted Houston, after Cross L had told them what he knew about the robbery. "Well that gives us one man to look for. He's likely hid out here in the valley and will wait for a chance to get out."

"He don't know the valley, though," objected Peace. "Never was in here before."

"That helps some," grinned Barney. "Mebbe the danged fool is tryin' to cross the range."

"Likely tryin' to get back on to the Fossil-shell," observed Houston. "He knows that country like a book and he'd likely get protection over there. Mebbe he'd hit for the Sun Prairie country."

They rode on toward Pasiooks, and it was about dark when Jim Horn and Bert Hart rode in at the ranch. They had run into one of the searchers further down the valley and had spent the rest of the day riding the hills. None of their party had even the slightest clue to where the robber had gone.

"We was with Blackie Erne," laughed Jim, "but he never mentioned the tin can. Bender and Mehl was with two of the boys from the Crescent, but we didn't see 'em. This is the most excitin' day I ever seen in this old valley. Whatcha think about Gus Sinks, Peace? I'll say that he's a real cute little jasper. I betcha he's got more money than he could ever count."

"I hope he stopped to count it," grunted Cross L angrily.

FOR two more days the cowboys searched out every corner of the valley. In twos and threes they combed it; making a drive of the entire country, but nothing came of it. Peace had said no more to Cross L about leaving the ranch, and Cross L was careful not to mention it.

Jess had said nothing to Peace. In fact, they had not spoken half a dozen words to each other since her father had said that Peace was going away.

But in spite of the fact that there was no trace of Gus Sinks, the cowboys still guarded the Pass and stopped every one going through. There was always the chance that Gus Sinks was hidden away, waiting the time when the cattlemen would relax their vigilance.

Then Peace Parker acted abruptly. He saddled his own horse, tied his war-bag behind the cantle and went up to the ranch-house. Cross L had seen him tie the sack to the saddle and knew that Peace Parker was leaving the Valley of the Chinook.

Peace had already told Jim and Bert good-by. They were sitting on the bunk-house steps waiting for him to leave. Cross L Marshall got to his feet and looked awkwardly at Peace, who put one hand on the old man's shoulder.

"Yo're goin', are yuh?" asked Marshall.

Peace nodded.

"Yeah, I'm goin', Cross L. I reckon that the other side of the hill is callin' me."

"I s'pose," Marshall sighed heavily and looked keenly at Peace. "You've got a few days' pay comin', Peace."

"Thasall right. I'll come back and collect it some day."

"By grab, I'd keep it if I thought yuh would, Peace."

"Keep it and see if I do," smiled Peace, and looked toward the door where Jess was standing. He turned to her and held out his hand.

"Are you going away?" she asked slowly.

"Yeah, I'm goin', Jess."

They looked steadily at each other for several moments, as they shook hands. It was an awkward situation. Cross L Marshall began to have throat trouble again and Peace grinned widely.

" 'S funny," said Peace slowly," but folks never seem to be able to say much when they're sayin' good-by. I reckon I'll be siftin' along, folks."

He turned on his heel and went down the steps, but stopped at the bottom and looked back at Jess.

"Be good to yoreself, Jess," he said softly, "mebbe I'll see yuh sometime."

He glanced at Cross L and went toward the barn, where Jim and Bert were coming to meet him. Cross L looked at Jess, his mustache bristling belligerently, but she was looking at Peace Parker.

"Aw, ——!" exploded Cross L. "That's what vas-leen does." He shook a finger in the general direction of the barn and spat viciously, "Vas-leen and per-fumed notes! By ——!"

He struck the porch post with a clenched fist.

"If you think for one —— minute that you—aw, ——!"

Jess had turned and looked at him, her eyes filled with tears. They looked at each other for a minute before she turned and went into the house.

Peace Parker was riding away now, and he waved back at Cross L Marshall, who looked at him and half-waved one hand as though in doubt. He glanced back at the open door and then at Peace Parker.

"I dunno," he told himself, "I dunno which one of yuh is the biggest darned fool, but I reckon it's horse-and-horse. Good-by, you homely son-of-a-gun. I hope yuh don't find nothin' on the other side of the hill and have to come back for the rest of yore salary."

Peace went slowly up the valley road, which wound in and out of the hollows. He had no idea of where he was going after disposing of his sheep. The Valley of the Chinook was home to him—the only real home he had ever known, and it was with a dull ache in his heart that he rode up the steep grades that led to Poncho Pass and looked back down the misty length of the finest cattle range in the world.

Below him he could see the silvery flash of sunlight on the headwaters of the Chinook river, and on each side the green, rolling hills, dotted with clumps of dark trees, faded away into the blue haze of the distance. It was good to look upon and Peace Parker feasted his eyes upon it before riding on into the tall crags of the Pass which would cut off his view.

As he rode into the narrow defile which was the Pass three men stepped into the road in front of him. It was Dud LePage, "Baldy" Hyatt and Frank Campion, and each of them was carrying a rifle.

Peace stopped and grinned at them.

"Hyah, Peace," greeted Le Page, a big raw-boned, grizzled cowboy, grinning back at Peace.

"Hello, Dud. Still guardin' the Pass, eh?"

LePage nodded and grounded his rifle.

"Yeah, we're not takin' any chances, Peace. Are yuh travelin' or goin' somewhere?"

"Travelin'," grinned Peace. "I'm leavin' the valley."

"Naw!"

Baldy Hyatt removed his hat and polished the shiny top of the head that gave him a nickname.

"You ain't leavin' us for good, are yuh?"

Peace nodded quickly.

"I reckon so, Baldy."

Frank Campion had taken no part in the conversation, and Hyatt turned to him.

"You know Peace Parker, don'tcha, Campion?"

Campion nodded indifferently.

"Yes, I know him."

Hyatt and LePage glanced at each other quickly, but turned back to Peace.

"She don't seem right that yo're leavin' us," said Hyatt. "Cripes, I thought yuh was personal property of the Cross L."

The inference was plain, because every one in the valley surmised that Peace was to marry Jess Marshall. Peace only grinned and shifted in his saddle.

"Yeah," he replied. "I been thinkin' of takin' a trip for quite a while."

"Well, yo're comin' back, ain'tcha?" asked Hyatt.

"No-o-o, I reckon not, Baldy—not for a while; so I'll tell yuh good-by and be on my way."

He held out his hand and shook hands with Baldy and LePage, while Campion looked on indifferently. But when Peace started on Campion stepped in front of him.

"You know why we're here, Parker, and you know that we're not letting any one go out of the valley without bein' sure about them. You've got a bundle behind your saddle."

"Yeah, I have," Peace squinted at Campion closely.

"——'s bells!" snorted Hyatt. "Why Peace Parker is——"

"That makes no difference," retorted Campion. "We're not here for our health."

"No, it kinda looks like you wasn't," agreed LePage warmly. "Do yuh suspect Peace Parker? Ha, ha! Ha, ha!"

"What is in that bundle, Parker?" demanded Campion angrily.

"A couple of shirts, a pair of socks, some overalls and a couple of blankets. Oh, yeah, there's a necktie, too. Do yuh want to try and search it, Campion?"

Peace was leaning forward in his saddle, his right arm crooked at the elbow. Campion had seen him in that same position before, and he knew that Peace Parker was a very sudden person with a gun.

"No," Campion shook his head, "I don't want to search you."

Peace nodded and rode on through the Pass, while Baldy and LePage congratulated Campion on his lack of curiosity. Campion smarted under their rough humor, but knew better than to incur their enmity.

"What I don't *sabe* is why he's leavin' here," complained Baldy. "I thought that him and Jess Marshall was goin' to hook up for life."

"Yeah, I heard they was goin' to get married," nodded LePage. "She could do a dang lot worse, y'betcha!"

"He is not going to marry Miss Marshall," stated Campion.

"How do yuh know?" queried Baldy.

"Because I am going to marry her myself."

"You are?" Baldy gasped audibly. "Whatcha know about that!"

"What I just said goes as she lays," said LePage seriously, and added, "I reckon she's goin' to."

PEACE rode to Tarp City and spent the night there. Tarp City was not interested in the troubles of Chinook Valley, but Peace talked things over with Sheriff Houston who was of the opinion that Gus Sinks had got out of the valley ahead of the posse of cowboys and made his escape into the Fossilshell.

The next morning Peace saddled his horse and headed for the Sun Prairie country which was located north and east of Tarp City and about fifteen miles away.

It was a desolate, sheeped-out country of bald buttes, swept clean of verdure and smelling strongly of sheep. Bands of sheep, marked by dust clouds, were moving about the hills. The road was entirely blotted out by the passing of numberless sheep. Peace had no idea of where he might find his band of sheep, so he swung into the hills and accosted the first sheepherder he ran across.

The man confessed total ignorance. Peace explained that the herd was marked with a painted cross on their backs, but this meant nothing in the life of this sheepherder.

Peace spent the whole day, riding from place to place, but no one could tell him where the cross-marked band was located. Finally he wrinkled his long nose in disgust and headed for Tarp City.

"I reckon I just dreamed that I owned sheep," he reflected as he swung along the side of a bald butte, which had been cultivated by the sharp hooves. Below him, a band of sheep were moving slowly southward, an indistinct mass in the clouds of dust stirred up by their passing.

Peace rode down, intending to pass them, but he happened to see his own brand on the back of a wooly straggler. The herder was a man about middle-age, gray as a badger, and with a scar running from above his left temple to a spot near the left corner of his mouth.

It gave him a leering expression, which did not belie the evil of the rest of his countenance. He carried a Winchester rifle in the crook of his arm and looked suspiciously at Peace Parker.

"Kind of a dusty job, ain't it?" grinned Peace.

"Yeah, yuh bet it is," agreed the man.

Peace sized him up and looked at the sheep. Surely this was not the Basque herder spoken of by Gus Sinks, thought Peace.

"Feed gettin' pretty short, ain't it?" asked Peace.

"—— short!"

The herder motioned a dog to pick up some stragglers, and they watched the trained sheep-dog round them up and close up the rear of the band.

"I wonder if there's any chance to pick up some cheap woolies," said Peace. "Must be money in 'em now."

"Not much." The man spat dryly.

It was dry work following that drifting herd.

"Who owns this herd?"

The herder squinted up at Peace, looking narrowly at him.

"I do," he grunted.

"Don't want to sell 'em, do you?"

"No. Just bought 'em myself."

"Just?" queried Peace.

"Huh?" He squinted at Peace again.

"How long ago did yuh buy 'em?"

"Long ago?"

The sheep-herder repeated that much of the question and looked away for a moment. Then—

"What's it to you, stranger?"

"Well," Peace grinned widely, "yuh see, there's been a lot of sheep-herders sellin' off stock that don't belong to 'em, and I'm here investigatin'."

"I *sabe*. Hired by the sheep men, eh?"

Peace did not say, but the shepherd dug into the inside pocket of his vest and drew out a soiled paper.

"I reckon you'll find that this is all right," he said as he handed Peace the paper.

It was a bill of sale for three thousand sheep, in favor of John Smith, and was signed by Gus Sinks. Peace studied it closely and handed it back to the man.

"All right?"

The sheep-herder looked closely at Peace as he tucked the paper back into his pocket.

Peace nodded.

"Yeah, it's made out properly, I reckon. Yuh see, we've got to be careful."

"That's right."

The man smiled broadly for the first time and seemed at ease.

"I suppose there's crooked work done every little while."

"Yeah—every little while. Well, I've got to be movin' on. You headin' for Tarp City?"

"Uh-huh. Slow work movin' sheep, but I'll likely be in there by noon tomorrow."

Peace nodded and rode around the band, which had belonged to him. He could still prove ownership. He had plenty of witnesses to prove that Gus Sinks was only a hired man, but he was not going to argue with this man.

He rode back to Tarp City and went to Sheriff Houston. He told Houston what had happened to the sheep, and Houston exploded over the information. But Peace merely grinned and asked Houston to do nothing.

"Well, yuh ain't goin' to let 'em get away with anythin' like that, are yuh?" demanded Houston.

"It ain't hardly ethical," agreed Peace, "but let's not say anythin' about it."

"Well, they're yore sheep," agreed Houston wearily. "If you want to be a Santa Claus to some——sheep-herder, go ahead, Peace."

As they came out to the door of the office a middle-aged man, wearing a black suit and a wide, black hat, came up to them. He was not a pleasant-loooking man with his square chin and thin-lipped mouth beneath a broad, flat nose.

"I beg your pardon," he said crisply. "I am a stranger around here—a cattle buyer—and I came here to get some information."

"Well," replied Houston bruskly, "we'll listen and do our dangdest."

A slight smile flashed across the stranger's lips and he nodded slightly.

"Fair enough. I wanted some information on Chinook Valley. I understand that a lot of cows are shipped out of there and I wanted to find out who was handling their stuff, and whether it would be worth my while going in to talk with them."

Houston looked keenly at him and motioned to Peace.

"Parker knows every inch of the place and he'd know."

"Well," smiled Peace, "I know the place, but I'm darned if I could answer yuh, stranger. I don't reckon that any buyer has a cinch on the output, and if your prices are right yuh might do business."

"Fair enough. Who are the big owners?"

Peace gave him the names of several cattlemen and he wrote the names in a note-book. Then he thanked them both and went back across the street.

"A husky lookin' jasper," commented Houston.

Peace nodded and studied the back of the man. There was a peculiar stiffness about his walk that betokened the fact that the man had spent much time in the saddle. He twisted slightly at the hips at each step, and Peace drew a mental picture of this same man in chaps and high-heeled boots.

"Old time cow-man," observed Peace to himself. "Betcha he was a go-getter in his time."

Some cowboys were riding in from the Fossilshell and waved at Houston as they came past. Peace strolled up the street to a restaurant and went in to eat. He was short of money and wondered just what he was going to do.

His savings had all been in the Pasiooks bank and now he was unable to sell off his sheep.

"Looks kinda like I was goin' to have to

forget the other side of the hill for a while," he reflected.

After his meal he went over to the Tarp City saloon. The strange cattle buyer was drinking with some of the men from the Fossilshell—or rather, they were drinking with him. Peace sat down against the wall and watched the activities in the place.

In about fifteen minutes Frank Campion came in. He saw Peace Parker but did not speak. One of the cowboys called to him and he joined their party. Peace heard them tell the buyer that Campion was from the Chinook Valley, and they began talking prices.

After a few more rounds of drinks Campion and the buyer went outside. It was growing dusk. Peace got up and went out just in time to see them disappear into the livery-stable. He crossed the street to the front of Carney's store where he leaned against a post until the two men came out, leading a saddled horse. Campion went to the hitch-rack, mounted his horse and joined the cattle-buyer.

"That's funny," reflected Peace. "Campion came in with a thirst and the stranger was half-loaded, but they're leavin' it behind. I never seen a cow-man with a thirst that was so anxious to sell stock that he'd quit drinkin' to make a sale."

Peace swung across the street, untied his horse and got into the saddle. Without showing undue haste he rode down the street, but as soon as he was clear of Tarp City he shook up his horse and hit the Poncho Pass grades at a stiff gallop.

There was no real reason for Peace following these two men except that he was a student of cowboy nature and was following what might be called a "hunch." It was the same feeling that causes a gambler to back a poor hand to the finish, feeling that something unforeseen will happen.

In a few minutes he reached a straight piece of road and saw Campion and the stranger ahead of him. They were riding at a stiff gallop. He drew up slightly, but did not slacken speed too much.

As he swept around a curve, going more cautiously, he suddenly jerked his horse to a standstill. Campion and the stranger had left the road and were climbing up the broken hog-back, heading toward the secret trail.

Peace turned and spurred his horse back around the curve, out of sight of the two men, in case they might look back.

"Now, what do yuh think of that?" grunted Peace to himself wonderingly. "That son-of-a-gun trailed me through that place and now he's takin' a cattle-buyer in the same way."

There was no way of explaining it. As far as Peace could see there was no reason for Campion to take this man into the Valley by a route which was kept secret. It would take at least an hour longer to go in by the trail than by the road so he knew that they were not going in that way as a short-cut.

The two men had disappeared now, and Peace knew that their view of the grades had been shut off, so he spurred ahead toward the Pass, going back into the valley he had left but a short time before.

No one guarded the road now, or, if they did, they were not stopping any one going toward the valley. He topped the Pass and took it easier on the down grades. He knew he could head the two riders without any trouble.

The valley was flooded with moonlight now and his galloping horse made little sound on the dust-padded road. Mile after mile he reeled off before he came to the spot where he left the road and headed into the hills.

An examination of the old cattle-trail showed that the riders were still somewhere back in the mountains; so he took it easier. Finally he reached the narrow cañon which wound back across the summit, and dismounted.

He had reached a spot where the two riders must pass within a short distance from him. Here he had no chance of missing them, in case they came through. Farther down the slopes they might take their own direction into the valley, and he might fail to see them.

He had left his horse in a thicket and stretched himself beside a granite outcropping. Above the Pass hung the moon like a great opal ball. Somewhere a night-bird called in a shrill voice, and far down the slopes a pair of owls hooted a duet.

A wild-cat, in search of its evening meal, crossed the slope just above Peace, like a little gray shadow and melted into the jack-pines. Peace grinned contentedly but wished that he might dare to roll a smoke.

Then, from a point far above him, he heard the murmur of voices, as if two men were arguing. It was impossible for

him to distinguish voices or words but he knew that it was Campion and the cattle-buyer.

But they did not come on down the slope. The voices ceased and he did not hear them again. Half-an hour passed and still the two riders did not appear.

Peace rubbed his chin and wondered at the why and wherefore of it all. Tired of inaction he untied his horse, swung into the saddle and headed for the rocky pass. He had made up his mind to challenge Campion for what he had already done and leave the outcome in the hands of fate.

He had almost reached the rocky defile, when he looked back down the slope. Three indistinct figures emerged from the timbered slope and came toward him. They were three mounted men.

Peace dropped off his horse and led it into the shadow of a cliff, holding a hand over its nostrils. The riders came on over the rocky edge, passing close to Peace. They were talking openly, and Peace recognized them as being Bender, Mehl and Erne.

They went past him and into the defile, traveling slowly.

"It's a —— good thing he showed us the way in daylight," grunted Bender. "The —— himself couldn't find it at night."

"And there'd be —— to pay if Chinook Valley knew that we was wise to it," added Erne, chuckling loudly.

Peace grinned to himself. He knew that Campion had showed his men where the secret trail was located—and for some mighty good reason.

"Mebbe," reflected Peace, "they framed up to keep me from usin' the road that evenin', and it was all planned to have Campion see if there was another way in. But why do they come through here?"

He waited until they had passed out of earshot and mounted again. He traveled slowly now, although he felt sure that they did not suspect his presence. Just short of the end of the defile he drew rein.

In the notch of the cañon, silhouetted against the sky, were the riders. He could see them all now. It was impossible for him to approach nearer without danger of discovery. They were evidently arguing about something, as he could see one of them waving his arms at times, and their voices came in bursts of indistinct words.

Then they seemed to group together and disappear to the right of the defile. Peace moved ahead, wondering at their intentions. They should have gone to the left to get back to the road.

He went slowly out to the edge of the defile where the eastern slope of the mountain began and watched closely. Far below him he could hear the horses moving through the brush, the sound getting more faint all the time, as the riders went down the hill.

"Goin' down a new way so they won't have to take a chance of bein' seen from the road," he decided, after thinking it over. "No reason why yuh couldn't go that way, except that it's a long, hard trip and a roundabout way to Tarp City. But what does it all mean?"

Peace humped in his saddle and tried to reason it out. Why should Campion take a stranger up there, he wondered? And why did Bender, Mehl and Erne meet them there?

From what Bender had said, it was reasonable to suppose that the meeting was by appointment. But why? And was the meeting of Campion and the cattle-buyer premeditated? Peace shook his head and took the left-hand side of the cañon, heading back to Tarp City.

THAT same night Chris Sorensen and Jim Claypool, the owner of the Wagon Wheel outfit, the last ranch at the southern end of the valley, came to the Cross L. Claypool was a dark-faced, somber-eyed sort of an individual, prone to arguments and settled in his convictions. Usually he prefaced his objections by saying, "Yeah, but—" and this habit had caused him to be known as "Yeabut" Claypool.

Since Peace Parker had left the ranch Cross L Marshall had chewed much tobacco and uttered many strange and wonderful oaths. He even swore at Saleratus who promised to feed him ground glass at mealtime. Saleratus felt as bad over the departure of Peace Parker as any of them, and he said he'd be ——ed if anybody was goin' to rag him when he felt melancholy.

And Cross L was in no mood to enjoy visitors. Sorensen and Claypool sat down in the living-room and tried to appear at ease. Jess had wanted to take their hats, but they assured her that it was hardly necessary.

"Well, whatcha got on yore minds?"

Cross L knew that it was not merely a

friendly visit so he wanted them to come right to the point.

"Well," Claypool twisted his hat nervously and cleared his throat, "well, I been talkin' to Chris, yuh see. Me and him has been kinda talkin'."

"That's fine," agreed Cross L, a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "Shows that yuh both got vocal cords."

Claypool squinted at Cross L, but that worthy was as serious as an undertaker.

"Yeah, we've been talkin'—me and Chris."

"Well, for ——'s sake, I hope yuh didn't come up here to brag about it!" exploded Cross L.

"It was about the bank robbery," prompted Sorensen.

"Oh, I see."

"Yeah, but mebbe yuh don't see," said Claypool, glad of the opening.

"Me and Chris got to talkin' about the robbery. Yuh see, Peace Parker brought that Sinks down to Pasiooks. I hear that Sinks was Parker's hired man."

"That ain't got nothin' to do with the robbery."

"Yeah, but mebbe it has, Marshall. This here hired man robs the bank, makes his getaway and we lose all our money, don't we?"

"I did," said Cross L dryly.

"We all did, as far as that's concerned," agreed Sorensen.

"Yeah, but that ain't what I'm drivin' at," stated Claypool. "This here hired man does the job. It ain't but a danged short time until Peace Parker pulls——"

"Whop!"

Cross L shot out of his chair and leaned over Claypool, who stared up at him.

"Dang yuh, don'tcha say it, Yeabut!" roared Cross L.

"Well!" exploded Claypool wonderingly. "You knowed what I meant without me sayin' it, Marshall."

"You said it," corrected Marshall slowly, "but don'tcha say it agin."

"Yeah, but what became of Sinks? Why did Parker pull out?"

Marshall squinted away and reached back for his chair. Jess was sitting in a rocking-chair beside the table, and now he looked directly at her, but she did not look up.

"Why?" Marshall shook his head. "I dunno exactly, but he said he wanted to see the other side of the hill."

"Zasso?" queried Claypool. "I suppose that Sinks is on the other——"

"Hol' on!" rasped Marshall threateningly. "If you make another remark agin' Peace Parker, I'll slap yuh to a peak and slap the peak off."

"Izzat so!"

"Now, have a little sense," begged Sorensen. "Fightin' won't get us nowhere. Let's look at this just as though we didn't know Peace Parker a-tall, will yuh?"

"Can't be done," declared Cross L. "I know him, and I'll be ——ed if I can make m'self talk like I didn't."

"Yeah, but—listen." Claypool leaned forward and cleared his throat. "Yuh got to admit the facts, Marshall. He didn't leave here for nothin', did he? He was yore foreman. He had some money of his own in the Pasiooks bank. I found that out from Clayton.

"Parker went away for good, didn't he? Yeah? Then why didn't he try to get the money that the bank owed him? He just rode away, thasall. Looks kinda queer to me. Looks kinda queer to a lot of folks, Marshall."

"Yeah?" Marshall's mustache bristled belligerently. "Looks kinda queer, eh? Lotsa things look queer to yuh, don't they, Claypool? F'r instance, it looks queer to yuh that the earth is round, don't it? That's 'cause yo're a slant-eyed yaller-hammer and thinks that everythin' is flat if it ain't got corners for yuh to feel of."

"Naw, I ain't no slant-eyed nothin'!" snorted Claypool. "I've got a lot of *sabe*, and this whole thing looks like it was all framed up. I ain't got nothin' pers'nal agin' Peace Parker. Why, I heard that he rode out of here with a big bundle behind his saddle. Le Page, Hyatt and Campion stopped him on Poncho Pass and Campion wanted to search the bundle, but Parker bluffed him.

"Le Page and Hyatt kinda stood in with Parker and Campion didn't want to start nothin' alone."

"Yuh dang well know he didn't!" grinned Marshall. "He monkeyed with that buzz-saw once and got in a jam."

"Well," observed Sorensen wearily, "we ain't gettin' no place, Claypool," and then to Marshall, "Cross L, you know danged well that I liked Peace Parker. He's a —— of a nice feller, but in a case like this yuh got to put yore feelin's behind yuh.

"I can see things like Claypool does, and—I dunno," Sorensen shrugged his shoulders and got to his feet. "I don't accuse nobody—nor trust 'em. If Peace Parker didn't have no reason, except to see the other side of the hill, I'd say that we ought to kinda find out for ourselves what he aimed to find over there."

It was a long speech for Sorensen and he was winded at the last word. Claypool got to his feet and put on his hat.

"I'm goin' to Tarp City," declared Claypool, "and I'm goin' to put the facts up to Sheriff Houston. I've got a lot of Chinookers backin' me in this; *sabe?* Goodnight."

They turned and went out of the door, closing it softly behind them. Cross L Marshall did not look up nor speak as they went out. Their horses' hoofs sounded hollowly on the hard ground as they rode away.

Marshall lifted his head and found Jess looking at him across the table. He started to speak, but changed his mind and got to his feet.

"Dad, why didn't you tell 'em why he left?" she asked softly. "It might save Peace a lot of trouble."

Cross L started for his bedroom, but turned at the door and looked back at her.

"Would Peace tell 'em why he left?" he demanded.

She did not reply. He turned and opened the door, but stopped with the knob in his hand and looked back at her.

"Say, ain't yuh kinda takin' a lot of credit to yourself, Jess? How do we know why he left?"

He turned quickly and went into his room, while Jess bent over her work. He had hurt her feelings badly with his two questions, but she forgave him quickly because she knew of his intense loyalty to Peace Parker, and that he had said what he did as a vent for his own anger against everything.

In a few minutes he came out, drawing on his coat, but not soon enough to conceal the cartridge belt around his waist and the heavy Colt revolver in his holster.

"Where are you going, dad?" she asked.

"Nobody's business!" he growled. "If anybody asks yuh where I'm gone—don'tcha tell 'em, Jess."

"How could I tell them?" wonderingly.

"Because you know I'm goin' to Tarp City. By grab, I'm goin' to be there when Claypool opens his trap to Houston, and I'm goin' to ram a hot six-gun barrel down among his vocal cords. I'm lookin' for these Chinookers who are seein' queer things, that's what I'm lookin' for."

He thumped toward the door, but Jess crossed the room and took him by the arm.

"Dad, don't do anything to cause trouble. Peace Parker wouldn't want you to—and he can take care of himself."

Cross L squinted at her.

"Thasso? Think he can, eh? Lemme tell yuh somethin', Jess: when a danged fool's mind gets in such a shape that he goes huntin' for the other side of a hill, just because his best girl gets stuck on a vas-leen-haired dude—he—can't—take—care—of—himself. Leggo my arm, young lady."

He flung open the door, stamped down the steps and headed for the barn. Jess shut the door softly behind him and went back to her work.

Cross L was not a delicate handler of horses, and Jim Horn heard him swearing at the corral. It did not take Jim and Bert long to find out why Cross L was saddling a horse. In fact, Cross L told them in glowing, if profane terms, just why he was going to Tarp City.

And without further explanation, Bert and Jim got their saddles. Old Cross L made no comment, but their hasty actions caused him to quit swearing long enough to chuckle to himself. A few minutes later they rode away from the ranch—heading toward Tarp City.

PEACE went back to Tarp City and hung around the saloons until nearly daylight, but Campion and the cattle-buyer did not show up; neither did Bender, Mehl nor Erne put in an appearance.

He ate an early breakfast at an all-night restaurant and rode out of town just before daylight, heading toward the Sun Prairie country. Peace wanted to have another talk with the sheepherder. Perhaps this man might know something about Gus Sinks, he thought.

He expected to find the sheep-camp a few miles out of town, but he traveled almost into the Sun Prairie country without seeing anything of the sheep or the herder. The band had been following the road, and there was no reason for the herder to leave it. There was no chance of a short-cut, as the

road ran almost in a straight line to Tarp City.

Peace reached the spot where he had talked to the herder, and turned back.

"Mebbe the son-of-a-gun recognized me and pulled out in a different direction," he reflected uneasily.

He did not want to lose sight of his own property. But there was no place for the man to hide them.

There was no sheep range to the west, and if he drove them south or east he would encounter the line-riders of the Fossilshell. His only chance was either to keep them on Sun Prairie or ship them from Tarp City.

"Got me fightin' my own head," observed Peace. "Mebbe I passed 'em."

He rode on slowly toward Tarp City, scanning the hills which were so bare of verdure that a grasshopper would have been visible at a great distance. About two miles from Tarp City he saw a rider coming toward him. He appeared to be in a great hurry and when he got closer Peace saw that it was Sheriff Houston.

He drew up beside Peace and mopped his brow with the sleeve of his shirt.

"Whatcha sweatin' about, sheriff?" grinned Peace.

"I sneaked out of town," declared Houston seriously.

He turned in his saddle and looked back.

"I hope nobody seen me leave there, 'cause it might look bad."

"Looks bad when the sheriff has to sneak out," admitted Peace seriously.

"Yeah, that's right. Now listen to me, Peace; they're on your trail. I don't need to open either one of my eyes to know —— well that you're innocent, but them danged——"

"Innocent of what?" interrupted Peace quickly.

"Aw-w-w, of havin' anythin' to do with that Pasiooks bank robbery. Lot of them —— Chinookers got the idea that you and Gus Sinks was in cahoots on it, Peace. They point out the fact that you never went after your money and that you're pullin' out for good, and—aw, ——!"

Houston stopped and mopped his brow. Peace stared at him for several moments and a grin widened his mouth.

"It does look kinda like I was tryin' to out-smart 'em, don't it, Houston? Reckon they'll put me in jail?"

"—— right! That's why I snuck out on 'em. Kinda had an idea yuh was up this way. Now," Houston shook a finger at Peace, "you keep out of Tarp City, do yuh hear me? I'm danged if I want yuh clutterin' up my jail. Them Chinookers will stick there in Tarp and likely get drunk. I'll do a lot of huntin', but —— little findin'; *sabe?* Now you hit the grit, you homely son-of-a-gun!"

"Buck, yo're breakin' the law," observed Peace.

"Let her break!"

"Did they swear out a warrant for me?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Uh-huh," grunted Peace softly.

He knew that Houston had the warrant in his pocket.

"Where's yore sheep?" asked Houston impatiently.

"I dunno, Buck. Can't find 'em anywhere."

"——, yuh can't lose three thousand sheep! Here."

Houston took out a note-book and tore out a leaf.

"You write me out an order, Peace. Date it yesterday; *sabe?* I'll sell them sheep for yuh, and as soon as yuh send me an address I'll send yuh the money."

"Buck, yo're plumb white, but I can't do it, I appreciate what you'd do for me, but I've kinda got a reason. We'll let the sheep alone for a while, I reckon. You hunt for me, and I'll hunt for what I can find."

"Well," reluctantly, "if that's the way yuh feel about it, Peace. I'll swing wide and come in on the Fossilshell road. But, dang your hide, keep away from Tarp City. *Adios.*"

"Good-by, Buck."

The sheriff spurred his horse and swung to the left, heading for the Fossilshell road which went into town on the east side. Peace watched him until he faded out in the distance, and rode on.

Peace reflected bitterly over what the sheriff had told him and wondered who composed the posse from the Chinook, but was forced to grin over the fact that it did look bad for him to leave there so soon after the robbery.

"And I brought Gus Sinks in there, too," he mused. "By golly, it sure looks bad. I knowed the bank was plumb broke; so I marked my savin's off the book, but they didn't see things my way. Well, I reckon

I've got to prove an air-tight alibi or go to jail."

Peace did not know where to go so he followed practically the same route taken by the sheriff. He knew that it would only be a short time until the gang from Chinook would be hunting the country for him, and he was not in favor of giving them either a race or a battle.

He struck the Fossilshell road about two miles out of Tarp City where he turned and rode slowly in the opposite direction. To the right of him stretched the brushy slopes of the hills which led to the mountains on the western side of the valley of the Chinook.

Almost behind him and to the right he could see the spot where the secret trail—but a secret no longer—went through the high cliffs. It was miles away and hazy in the noontime heat. Suddenly he drew rein and scanned the dusty road.

A herd of sheep had crossed there—crossed to the right-hand side of the road and were somewhere back in those brushy hills. It was evident that they had crossed but a short time before as there was no track of horse or vehicle since their passing.

Peace swung off the road and followed them. It was easy to trail a band of a thousand sheep through the brush, and Peace followed them about two miles before finding them.

They were scattered along the slopes of a small creek, feeding ravenously after their long drive. Peace grinned as he noticed that they were branded with a painted cross. It was his band of sheep and they were already dangerously close to the deadline of the Fossilshell.

He knew that there was an old tumbledown ranch-house and corrals just above there in a big clearing, and that this would probably be where he would find the scar-faced herder.

He rode down through the scattered band and crossed the little creek. On the further side he rode through the fringe of brush and came out into the opening. A few sheep were feeding out there and the sheepherder was engaged at a camp-fire beside the old ranch-house.

He moved backward against the house, as Peace rode into sight, and watched him closely. Peace merely glanced toward him and looked back at the sheep. As he turned back his horse seemed to break down on one shoulder and whirl wildly, and from the old house came the whang of a rifle shot.

Peace tried to jerk the horse to a standstill and to draw his gun, but he heard the thud of the next bullet into the horse, which went down in a headlong pitch.

Peace tried to save himself by throwing himself away from the falling horse, but only succeeded in losing his six-shooter and ended up by having his left leg pinned under the animal. It was all done so quickly that he had little time to do anything.

Peace had fallen flat on his back with his leg far enough under the horse to save his ankle but he was unable to move. It was possibly two minutes later that a shadow fell across his face and he twisted his head to look up at the scar-faced sheepherder, covering him with the Winchester.

"I kinda wanted to be sure yuh didn't have no gun."

Thus the sheepherder explained his slowness in making an appearance. He picked up Peace's gun and shoved it inside the waist-band of his overalls.

"It's a good thing to be sure about," admitted Peace calmly. "Now that yo're satisfied—will yuh try and move that dead animal enough to let my foot loose?"

"Can'tcha move your foot loose?"

"Do I look like a person that needs somebody to wait on him?" retorted Peace.

"No, I reckon yuh don't."

The man walked away toward the house and came back in a few minutes with a coil of rope with which he proceeded to tie Peace's arms to his side.

"I'm cautious, I am," he declared. "She's a lot easier to rope yuh now, pardner. Don't have to order yuh to so-and-so; *sabe?*"

"You sure got the right idea," applauded Peace. "I'd 'a' never thought of that. But what's it all about?"

The scar-faced man laughed but did not reply while he managed to drag the inert mass of horse-flesh off Peace's leg. Peace flexed his knee slowly and was glad to find that it was hardly injured at all.

"What's it about, eh?"

The scar-faced man sat down on the saddle-fender and rolled a smoke.

"You thought yuh was makin' me believe that you was the sheep inspector, didn't yuh? Pardner, I wasn't born yesterday. I *sabe* that there ain't no such animal. Also—" he leered at Peace, "I knowed who

yuh was all the time. My old friend Gus Sinks described yuh many a time."

"Then you knowed that these sheep didn't belong to Gus, eh?"

"'Course I knew it," the man laughed throatily. "Me and Gus had that all fixed."

"Yeah?" Peace grinned widely. "Mind rollin' me a smoke?"

"Yuh do need waitin' on, don'tcha? Well, I'll ——"

"Untie my hands and I'll roll my own."

"Any old time I do! Nope, I'll roll 'em for yuh."

He rolled a cigaret, lighted it and put it between Peace's teeth.

"You sure busted up my poor bronc," observed Peace sadly.

"Yeah, but I wasn't shootin' at the ——ed horse."

The man was a frank sort of a murderer and Peace grinned at his honesty.

"Well, I'm glad that yo're a rotten shot, pardner."

"Oh, I ain't so bad. I kinda hurried, thasall."

"Wasn't lookin' for me, eh?"

"Wasn't I? Huh! I sure was lookin' for yuh. I knowed you'd trail me down here. I didn't want to down yuh out in the open."

"Danged considerate of yuh," observed Peace. "Whatcha goin' to do with my sheep?"

"Your sheep! Sa-a-ay, git that idea out of yore mind. These are my sheep; *sabe?* Well, as soon as I fix you a-plenty I'm goin' to herd 'em into Tarp City, throw 'em into a corral and sell out."

"Fix me a-plenty, eh?"

"Y'betcha. What else can I do? I ain't no —— fool and I ain't no shepherd. These sheep are worth a lot of money, don'tcha know it? Enough to keep me a long time."

"Pardner, I'll make you a trade."

Peace spat out the remnant of his cigaret and grew serious.

"You tell me where Gus Sinks is and I'll give you a straight bill-of-sale to these sheep."

"Whatcha talkin' about?" incredulously.

"Just that. If you know anythin' about me, you'll know that I keep my word. You show me Gus Sinks and you can have these danged woolies."

The man shook his head.

"Nothin' like that, pardner. Gus is my bunkie and I won't squeal on him."

"That's danged square of yuh," observed Peace dryly, "and I appreciate it in yuh. Just the same, I'd make the trade with yuh."

"Nope. I ain't tradin' t'day, Parker."

"Too bad. Yuh know I trusted Gus Sinks. How long have yuh known him?"

The man reflected for a moment.

"I dunno. Anyway, it's a long time; too long to squeal on him."

"I see," Peace sighed deeply. "I liked him, too. I've only knowed him a few months. You remind me of him a little."

"Thasso?"

"Yeah. 'Course yuh don't look like him, but that scar on his face is kinda like yours."

The man felt on his face and nodded slowly.

"How'd he get the scar?" asked Peace.

"I dunno. I never asked him."

"Got it in a fight, I know that much about it," said Peace. "Said he lost the little finger off his left hand in the same fight. But Gus handled the truth kinda carelessly and I never believed him much. Likely lost his finger when he was learnin' to split wood."

The man grinned and nodded.

"That's how he lost it. Gus told lots-a stories about that finger. I dunno how he got the scar on his face, but he likely got kicked by a cow."

Peace laughed softly over the troubles of Gus Sinks and watched his captor closely, as he said—

"Well, whatcha goin' to do next?"

"I dunno."

The man seemed undecided but motioned Peace to get to his feet.

"I'll keep yuh in the old house for a while. I don't want to rub yuh out right away—if yuh behave. Can't let yuh loose that's a cinch. I ain't got nothin' agin' yuh personally—except that yo're in my way, and when folks git in my way, I usually fix 'em a-plenty."

"Where do you bury yore dead?" grinned Peace, stretching his long legs.

"Ne' mind where I plant 'em. You toddle along ahead of me and be glad that I'm in good humor t'day. I ain't no mean *hombre*, but I don't let nobody stand between me and a lot of money, yuh understand?"

Peace went into the old tumble-down ranch-house and the scar-faced man motioned him to sit down in a corner. It was

a dusty old place, with a broken floor, sway-backed roof and smelled strongly of pack-rats.

Scar-face proceeded to hog-tie Peace, who was unable to make any resistance. Satisfied that the job was well done, the scar-faced man went back to his cooking.

Peace squinted up at the sagging ceiling and a grin spread across his face. But Peace was not grinning over the fact that the roof sagged. Something had struck him as being funny and he chuckled to himself.

"Anyway," he reflected when his period of mirth had passed, "that posse of Chinookers ain't liable to find me here. Every cloud has a silver linin', if yuh only look at it in the right way. And if that shepherd is goin' to bump me off, I hope he don't wait until I get hungry enough to eat a mutton stew."

The scar-faced man shoved his head inside the door.

"Gittin' hungry?" he asked.

Peace sniffed. There was an odor of frying mutton. He shook his head quickly.

"Not for sheep meat."

"Huh! Before I git through with yuh, I'll betcha you'll be glad to eat sheep meat, Parker."

"I'll betcha I won't."

"Why won'tcha?"

"'Cause," grinned Peace, "I'll be so old and toothless that I can't chaw it."

The man laughed and went back to his fire. He was not without a sense of humor which was a lucky thing for Peace Parker.

IT WAS early that morning when Cross L Marshall arrived at Tarp City with his two cowboys, but Claypool and his men had already been there nearly an hour. They had secured a warrant which had been turned over to the sheriff.

Houston had complained bitterly over being dragged out of bed at that time of night and had declined to make a search in the dark for Peace Parker. But as soon as they had gone he had made preparations to warn Peace, who had already gone toward Sun Prairie.

Marshall was in just the right mood to do battle with Claypool or any of his crowd, which consisted of Chris Sorensen, Mike O'Neil and six cowpunchers. Mike owned the 77 outfit and a grim sense of justice, so he brought Sam Barill and Tony Laughlin, his two punchers, who were old gun-men.

Cross L, Jim and Bert found them all in the Royal Saloon, drinking success to their affairs, with Claypool as toastmaster. He growled at sight of Cross L, and Cross L returned the growl with fair interest.

"What are you doin' down here?" demanded Claypool.

"That's some more of your ——ed business, I suppose," observed Cross L.

"Yeah—mebbe it is." Claypool felt that there was strength in numbers and had little fear.

"I don't have to ask yuh what you're doin' here," said Cross L. "You've done told me, Claypool. And I don't mind tellin' yuh that we're here to hope real hard that yuh fall down on the job."

"Go ahead and hope," grinned O'Neil. "We've got the sheriff on Parker's trail."

"Lot of good that'll do yuh," said Jim Horn quickly. "Buck Houston couldn't trail a load of hay through a mesquite thicket."

"Mebbe," said Claypool meaningly, "he won't have to trail him. Parker was here last night and he's here yet."

"And you fellers ain't went after him?"

Cross L laughed scornfully and counted them.

"Nine of yuh. Why didn't yuh bring a dozen more and surround the town? Yuh might starve him out."

"That's the sheriff's business," said Claypool.

"And it took nine of yuh to come to see him, eh?" Thus Bert Hart sarcastically, "Yuh sure picked a swell bunch, Claypool. I s'pose it took nine of yuh to remember what yuh came for, didn't it?"

Claypool was mad. He hated to be ragged by these three men, but he knew that if this went much further some one was due to get hurt; so he invited the three to drink with them.

This was profanely declined by Cross L who turned and led his men outside.

"Claypool, yuh better stop 'em," advised O'Neil quickly. "They'll get to Parker ahead of the sheriff, if yuh don't."

Claypool started toward the door but stopped and came back to the bar.

"Why should I stop 'em?" he asked, emphasizing the personal pronoun. "You go and stop 'em, O'Neil."

But O'Neil turned back to the bar and poured out his drink.

"Somebody ought to stop 'em," observed Sorensen half-heartedly.

"All right," snapped Claypool, "you do it, Chris."

But Chris made no move to accept the commission. Every man at the bar knew that Cross L and his two men had gone to warn Peace Parker, but none of them felt in the mood to attempt to stop them.

"I never came down here to do battle with anybody," declared Claypool. "Marshall is one of our own people and he's a danged old fool—but I don't want to fight him."

"One alibi is as good as another," grinned O'Neil, "so what you said goes for me, too. Let's have another, gents."

"That's a lot more sensible than fightin," observed a cowpuncher joyously.

But Cross L did not find Peace Parker. He was not at either of the two hotels, and inquiries showed that he had not kept his horse in the livery-stable that night. They went down to Houston's house and were informed that the sheriff was not at home.

Barney McManus swore sleepily when they rapped on the door of the sheriff's office where he slept, and disclaimed all knowledge of everything, except that he was sleepy.

"I seen Peace yesterday afternoon," said Barney yawning. "Frank Campion rode toward the Pass with a cattle-buyer and in a few minutes Peace rode the same way. Nossir, I ain't seen him since."

"Peace headed back toward Chinook?" queried Cross L.

"Well, he went that direction," declared Barney. "And what in the —— do yuh want him for so badly?"

"They think he was in cahoots with Gus Sinks."

"With Gus Sinks? In the Pasiooks robbery? Now would yuh listen to such ——ed foolishness?"

Barney snorted his indignation.

"I think that Buck Houston is out lookin' for him," said Jim Horn. "They've sworn out a warrant for Peace."

"Who did?"

"Aw, there's Yeabut Claypool, Chris Sorensen, Mike O'Neil and some of their punchers. They're over at the Royal."

"They are, eh?"

Barney wrinkled his nose, as though an offensive odor annoyed his nostrils.

"Well, the best thing we can do is to split up the four of us and try to warn Peace. He's some'ers around this here country. Wait'll I git m' pants on."

"You can't go and warn him, Barney; there's a warrant out for his arrest," reminded Bert Hart.

"Can't, eh?"

Barney thought it over for a moment.

"Well, I can resign, can't I. This ain't no good job, anyway. If Buck Houston serves that warrant he'll git a new deputy, y'betcha."

About an hour later Buck Houston showed up. He had stabled his horse, and none of the Chinook outfit knew that he had carried a warning to the man they were after.

Cross L and Barney cornered him immediately, but the sheriff was non-committal. Then Barney tendered a verbal resignation, handed back his badge of office and went over to the Royal saloon with high hopes of talking out loud to Claypool & Co.

Houston pocketed Barney's star, grinned widely over Barney's emphatic resignation —and did nothing.

Claypool waxed profanely eloquent over Houston's lack of initiative, but the sheriff did not seem to care. Not so with Cross L Marshall. He followed Claypool around and tried to annoy him into argument. Every one expected momentarily that there would be a gun-battle, but Claypool had not misrepresented his own feelings when he said that he did not want to fight with Cross L.

Finally Claypool gathered his forces and rode away toward Sun Prairie. Most of the punchers were unsteady in their saddles and in no shape to do anything, except yell and sing, but they rode away without caring where they were going or why.

As they rode out of town, Frank Campion, Bender, Mehl and Erne rode in. They stopped at the Royal saloon and it did not take them long to find out the news. Campion listened to the evidence against Peace Parker seriously.

"Well," he announced, "Parker and I are not the best of friends; so the best thing I can do is to keep my mouth shut."

"Then I'll give yuh credit for havin' a little sense," applauded Cross L seriously.

Campion eyed Cross L, but said nothing. He realized that the old man was looking for trouble and he had heard that Cross L Marshall was not at all crippled in his

gun-hand. At any rate he turned back to his drink.

"Mebbe you know where Peace Parker is," suggested Jim Horn.

"Me?"

Campion turned and stared at Horn.

"Yeah. You and that cattle-buyer pulled out of here last evenin', and Peace follered yuh out."

"Eh?"

Campion upset his glass of liquor accidentally, but was too interested to right it.

"Peace Parker followed me—us?"

"That's what he done," declared Jim. "You two headed for Poncho Pass and Peace was right on your trail."

Campion's eyes narrowed and he stared down at the floor, deep in thought. His eyes flashed sideways to Bender who was watching him. Then Campion seemed to pull himself together and looked at Jim Horn.

"It's funny we didn't see him," he said slowly. "We didn't ride fast. Did he go all the way into the valley?"

"I dunno."

Jim shook his head.

"He was around here before midnight," thus the bartender horned into the conversation. "I seen him about that time. He didn't play—just kinda in and out, like he was lookin' for somebody."

"How long before midnight?"

Campion was interested.

"Oh, I dunno. Mebbe it was eleven o'clock—mebbe later, but it was before midnight."

"You fellers have a little drink with me?"

Campion nodded to the three from the Cross L.

Cross L was about to refuse, but Jim Horn accepted the invitation, and they joined Campion's party. Jim gave the old man a sharp glance, and he accepted the invitation without a word.

"We rode over here to warn Peace Parker," offered Jim, "but Claypool and his gang beat us to it. Didn't do 'em any good, 'cause Peace wasn't here. They're huntin' for him now, but they're too drunk to last long."

"Well, here's to Parker," Campion held up his glass and examined the liquor. "And may he get so far out of the country that the sheriff would have to pay ten dollars to send him a postal-card."

"Which he won't," chuckled Cross L. "Peace ain't the runnin' kind. Nossir, he'll play out his hand. What gets me is the fact that he was headed for Chinook Valley."

"Why do you suppose he's hanging around here for?" asked Campion.

"I'll betcha he's lookin' for Gus Sinks," Bert Hart seemed convinced that his was the reason. "Mebbe he's got a hunch that Gus is still in the Chinook."

"He'd be a fool to stay in there," observed Campion.

"Yeah—from our point of view. Sinks may be a fool, but he's sure fooled us good and plenty. Forty thousand dollars and a clean getaway."

"He ain't got away—yet," declared Cross L. "If Peace Parker can keep away from the law long enough, I'm bettin' he finds Gus Sinks."

"I'm trailin' my bet with yours," said Jim Horn enthusiastically. "Peace Parker likes to play a lone hand and he mebbe pulled out of the valley just so we'd let him run things to suit himself. He's a salty rascal."

"Well, I wish him luck," said Campion slowly. "I had no money in that bank, but I probably would have had some in there if this had happened a little later."

"Sell off some cows?" queried Cross L.

"No, I didn't. There was a difference of opinion on prices. These buyers want all the best of it."

"That's a fact," nodded Cross L. "I'll buy somethin' this time."

They all drank a good-luck to Cross L, and Campion and his men left the Royal. At the edge of the sidewalk, Campion spoke to Bender who nodded and went straight to the hitchrack where he mounted and rode back toward Poncho Pass.

Jim Horn stood beside a window and watched him leave. The other three crossed the street to the store and were in there a few minutes; when they came out each carried a number of bundles.

They came across the street, mounted their horses and followed Bender. Jim scratched his head and told Cross L what the Three Dot outfit had done. Cross L bit off a big chew of tobacco and frowned deeply.

"Whatcha suppose Bender went away ahead for?" queried Jim. "Why didn't he stay and pack his share of plunder?"

"Jim," Cross L's mustache bristled and

twitched violently, "I ain't no mind-reader."

"I ain't either but I've got a hunch that somethin' ain't just what it ought to be. I'll betcha that Campion knows where Peace Parker is."

"You don't think that Peace had a run-in with him, do yuh, Jim?"

Jim shook his head. "No, I don't. If they had a run-in, Peace would be here and we'd be lookin' for Campion."

Cross L grinned and slapped his leather-chapped leg.

"That's a cinch, Jim! Well, we've just got to wait and see which way the pickle is goin' to squirt."

PEACE soon found that the sheep-herder was no novice when it came to hog-tying a human being. He tried in every way to loosen his bonds but only succeeded in rubbing a lot of skin off his wrists.

Once that afternoon, Peace thought he heard voices. It was a dull murmur, as though two people were arguing; but no one came near the shack. The sheep-herder had left shortly after eating his meal and it was about two hours before he returned.

He sat down in the doorway and rolled a cigaret for Peace. He seemed very thoughtful over something and talked but little.

"Have yuh run out of words?" grinned Peace.

"Not exactly. I'm takin' the sheep to Tarp City late this afternoon and I'm goin' to leave you here. Mebbe I'll come back and mebbe I won't. Anyway, I won't be back before I sell the sheep; so you better pray for a quick sale."

"I suppose I don't eat while yo're gone, eh?"

"Don't look like it, does it? I suppose I'd save myself a lot of trouble by puttin' a bullet into yuh right now."

"Pleasant thing to think about," grinned Peace.

"Well, put yourself in my place. I can't let yuh loose to block me, can I? I can't come back here and let yuh loose, 'cause that would give yuh a chance to trail me down. We're both up against it, don'tcha know it?"

"Well," grinned Peace, "I ain't goin' to be a hero and ask yuh to sacrifice me to save yourself. Yuh know, that proposition I made yuh still holds good. You show me Gus Sinks and the sheep belong to you."

"Thasso? Suppose I just keep the sheep, anyway. You can't force me to accept your proposition; yuh must remember me and Gus had this all framed. He was to lift the money from the Pasiooks bank, while I disposed of the sheep. We're in cahoots on this, and yore offer don't interest me none."

"Kinda looks like a dead-lock," said Peace seriously.

"Yep. Well, I'm goin' to herd my sheep right now and we'll see about the rest."

The man got to his feet and stretched his arms. He was still carrying Peace's six-shooter in addition to his own. He studied Peace for a moment and came over to him.

"Got to kinda look yuh over, pardner. Can't take no chance on yuh workin' them ropes loose."

He rolled Peace over on his side, loosened the ropes a little and tied them off again. It eased the pressure on Peace's arms a little for which he was thankful.

"I reckon you'll stay put," he remarked. "I'll see yuh later. *Adios.*"

He walked away from the shack and Peace heard him swearing at the sheep as he rounded them up with the dogs. Peace could not see out of the door, but the shadows showed that it was well past mid-afternoon. The sound of the sheep and sheepherder died away and there was no sound, except the drone of insects.

Peace hitched back toward the wall and tried to sit up. He twisted at his wrists and a thrill went through him. The rope was slack enough for him to work one hand loose, and inside of a minute he had shucked the ropes from his body and got to his feet.

He took one step toward the door and stopped.

"Too easy," he muttered. "Too —— easy! Whatcha know about that?"

He backed to the wall and frowned down at the loose rope. Had the man made a mistake in the tying, or did he do it intentionally? Peace shook his head.

"Planted the whole thing, I betcha," he reflected bitterly. "When I walk out I get a bullet."

Cautiously he sidled to the door and peered out. His angle was limited and he could see nothing. There was no sound. He peered a little closer. Within six feet of

the doorway, leaning against the house, was that Winchester rifle.

Peace grinned, but without mirth. He knew that the rifle was there for a purpose. The scar-faced man knew that Peace would go after that rifle immediately, and Peace was just as sure that the scar-faced man was out there at that fringe of brush, waiting for him.

Peace squinted at the rifle and wondered if he dared to make a dash for it. It was a long chance.

"Betcha forty dollars it ain't loaded," he mused. "No danged fool would leave a loaded rifle that handy."

He had noticed the rifle the day before and a thought suddenly came to him. Peace, like all range men, instinctively noted the caliber of a rifle and the thought suddenly struck him that this rifle might mean something to his side.

He gathered up the rope and tied a heavy knot on one end. The muzzle of the rifle was leaning against the side of the building, which precluded any chance of roping it with a loop, but Peace had an idea.

He backed to the corner and circled the room, which put him on the opposite side of the door and on the same side with the rifle. Estimating the distance to the gun, he flung out the length of rope, throwing it the opposite direction from the gun.

Then, with a jerk of his wrist, and only exposing his forearm, he whipped the rope toward the gun. He felt it strike the gun, and jerked quickly, but the knot whipped loose and the rope came back.

Quickly he tossed it again and whipped back. This time the rope was a little longer and his forward jerk captured the gun. He dragged it swiftly through the doorway, and picked it up.

A flip of the lever showed the gun to be empty, but a glance at the caliber number on the top of the barrel caused Peace to grin with joy.

The scar-faced man had Peace's six-shooter but he had neglected to remove Peace's cartridge belt which was studded with 32-20 revolver cartridges. The rifle was a 32-20 caliber and would chamber the revolver cartridge. Both the 32-20 rifle and revolver were fairly new to the range-land, and the Cross L had made uncomplimentary remarks anent Peace's pop-gun. But Peace had showed them that the smaller caliber gun was more accurate and just as deadly as the more cumbersome ones. His gun was of .45 caliber frame which gave him the accustomed weight.

The question now was to find the location of the sheepherder. Peace took off his coat and hung it over a short piece of the broken flooring. Then he took his hat in his other hand and projected them past the edge of the doorway. At a distance it would seem that the point of a man's shoulder and the edge of his hat were in sight.

Whap!

Peace jerked the coat back, dropped the piece of board and flexed his fingers. The bullet had drilled a neat hole through the shoulder of his coat and splintered the board. "Mebbe that jasper can't shoot!" applauded Peace admiringly. "What he'd 'a' done to me would been a-plenty. Um-hm-m-m-m! Don't look as good as it did."

The rear door and windows had been boarded up long ago, and to Peace it looked like a case of staying out of sight until the sheepherder decided to leave—or until it got dark. The broken floor attracted his attention. The old house had been built upon heavy log sills and there seemed to be considerable room underneath. Peace examined it closely and crawled under. The dirt banking on the sides had fallen away and he was able to crawl to the side of the building and peer out. He could not get a clear vision of that side of the clearing, but he had an even break with any one that came into view for a radius of two hundred yards.

He could not see or hear the sheep now, but he was sure that the sheepherder would not leave until things were settled between them. Peace shoved the muzzle of his rifle through the aperture and squinted closely. He had a fair idea of where the shot had been fired from.

He knew that the sheepherder would stay where he could watch the front door and this knowledge was of assistance to Peace. He watched a certain spot in the brush for some little time. Something had caused a branch to jerk—and there was no wind.

It jerked again. Peace flattened his cheek against the butt of his rifle and sent a bullet whistling into that clump. The man must have been moving away, because beyond that spot, and to the right, the bushes jerked sharply.

Twice more Peace fired but without visible results. He did not have a target but felt that his bullets were going very close. The bushes did not wave again; so he relaxed and waited for the sheepherder to make his next move.

Straight across the clearing from Peace was the brush-lined creek with high banks, where a man might easily walk without being seen from the cabin. Peace had left the rifle muzzle protruding from under the cabin, while he slid back a foot or two, as he rolled a smoke.

Suddenly the dirt bank near his head seemed fairly to explode, and to his dirt-filled ears came the snap of a high-power rifle. Peace rolled aside and clawed the dust out of his eyes. The bullet had evidently mushroomed into that clay-like dirt and had driven Peace's mouth, nose, ears and eyes full of it.

He reached blindly for his rifle, yanked it with him and crawled farther back toward the rear of the building, while shot after shot tore through the hard dirt and filled the air with dust and fine gravel. The sheepherder was taking a chance on hitting Peace by searching the whole length of the shack.

But Peace hugged the rear of the place, while he tried to blink the dust out of his eyes and wait for the man to finish his magazine of shots.

"The danged murderer snuck up the creek on me," reflected Peace, "and I left my gun-muzzle outside as a marker for him. That was a smart thing to do. Peace Parker, if you git killed, it's yore own fault."

The sheepherder's rifle had made many apertures in the banked foundation of the shack and Peace crawled to the near corner and peered out. The man was too smart to show himself, but Peace felt sure that he was just behind the creek bank.

Then Peace saw a slight movement. It was the crown of the man's hat and it moved in a perfectly natural way. A moment later it flipped upward from the jerk of Peace's bullet, and almost at the same time a bullet riccocheted off the barrel of Peace's gun and thudded into the corner of the building.

Peace rolled and slid sideways toward the center of the place and crawled rapidly toward the front, while another bullet smashed into the corner of the foundation.

"Son-of-a-gun foxed me," complained Peace. "Hung up his old hat while he went down the creek and laid for me. But it didn't git him any scalps."

He crawled to the side again and peered out. This time he was careful to keep near the corner where the angle gave him slightly better protection.

Suddenly he caught a flash of a man's body, but at an extreme angle. It was only a glimpse, but it showed that the man was running up through the brush as though to circle the shack.

Peace grinned and crawled to the opposite side, where he carefully kicked away the banking. The man had driven him away from the peep-holes and was going to circle the cabin, thought Peace.

It was the reasonable thing to do, under the circumstances, and Peace congratulated himself on having seen the man start his circle. He watched closely. Beyond him the hill sloped sharply and was a mass of brush and rocks.

The man was a long time showing up, he thought. Perhaps he was sneaking up at the rear. Peace squinted reflectively.

"Still," reflected Peace, "he ain't a lot better off than I am. He's gotta peek under to see me."

Suddenly he jerked his gun forward and flattened himself as low as possible. He had seen the man again, and this time he was apparently mounting a horse in the jack-pine thicket back on the slope.

Peace cuddled the butt of the gun carefully and squinted down the sights. Again the man came into view, spurring his horse, as though to circle back toward the rear of the house but still protected by the high brush. Peace was unable to get a clear view of either man or horse but he took a chance and squeezed the trigger.

Almost at the crack of the rifle the horse fell away headlong into the brush and the rider seemed to fairly somersault out of the saddle.

"Walk, you son-of-a-gun!" exploded Peace. "You made me walk."

For several moments there was no sign of the man, and then Peace got a flash of him, running up the slope, dodging from rock to rock. His movements were too swift for Peace, who was in a cramped position and unable to elevate his gun-muzzle sufficiently to cover the target.

Peace grinned thankfully and began

rolling a cigaret. Just why the sheepherder had decided to pull out was a mystery to him, but he was perfectly willing to have the man leave.

He was about to light his cigaret when he heard the thud of running horses and a man's voice yelling something. They came up to the cabin, and he heard the confused murmur of voices as they dismounted.

Came a creak of the old floor as some one stepped inside, and the voices were more distinct.

"Yeah, but who in —— was doin' the shootin'?"

It was Claypool's voice.

Several voices joined into the argument and more boots creaked on the floor.

"Well, that's Peace Parker's bronc," declared Chris Sorensen's voice, "and it's deader than ——"

"Let's have a drink," suggested another, and this was met with approval.

"You got the bottle yoreself, Barill," stated Mike O'Neil's voice.

There was a great shuffling of feet, as they drank from the bottle, and then all went outside. Ensued a lot of meaningless gabble in which Peace caught fragmentary sentences relating to dead horses and sheep. Then they all mounted and rode away.

Peace crawled back to the opening in the floor in time to see them disappear into the brush, heading back toward the Fossilshell road.

"Well," grinned Peace, "that's once that whisky helped me out. If that bottle wasn't about empty they'd 'a' done some lookin' around. Hurrah for hooch!"

He walked outside and peered around the side of the shack. There was nobody in sight, but he was taking no chances on the sheepherder this time. He draped his coat on a stick and tried his same experiment again, but this time there was no response.

He tried it at the other corner, with the same results. Then he stepped out from the building, taking a chance that the man had kept on going. After a hasty glance toward the brushy slope he stepped back and jerked up his rifle.

A horse was coming down through the trees and as it broke out into the open, Peace saw that it was saddled and bridled. For several moments it stood there, shaking its head jerkily, and then came on toward him. He watched it, a quizzical expression in his eyes. The horse stopped a few feet away, and then Peace knew what had happened.

Just at the arch of its neck was a jagged furrow, where his bullet had plowed its way. The horse had been creased, or in other words, shocked momentarily by the bullet and had fallen as though instantly killed.

Peace spoke to the animal, which let him pick up the reins. It seemed slightly dazed and very docile, but Peace knew that the animal was not seriously hurt.

"Couldn't do it in a year, if I wanted to," he confessed to himself, "but I'm sure glad that this was my lucky day. I'd hate to hurt a innocent horse."

He squinted at the brand and frowned thoughtfully. He knew that he had seen this horse before. Suddenly it struck him that this horse belonged to the Tarp City livery-stable and was the one that the cattle-buyer had hired the night before.

"Well, that puts a new kink in the tangle," he reflected. "What's that bronc doin' over here?"

He rubbed its nose softly.

"Dog-gone yuh, I wish yuh could talk. I'd sure have a lot of questions to ask yuh, bronc."

Pwee-e-e-e!

A bullet struck the ground between Peace and the corner of the house and went humming off into the brush. The report showed that the shooter was doing some long-range work, but Peace figured that it was too close for comfort; so he swung into the saddle, spurred the horse to the left, which would put the building between him and the rifleman, and rode away toward the brushy creek.

No more shots were fired, which proved that Peace's calculations were correct. He drew up on the bank of the creek where he was hidden by the brush and debated whether to go away or wait and see if the shepherd would come back, but decided that the shepherd was too wise for such a proceeding, and rode away.

Peace knew that whisky and man-hunting did not mix well; so had little to fear from the Claypool outfit. They would go back to Tarp City, line up at the bar and argue over the dead saddle-horse they had found.

But this did not help Peace's situation to any great extent. He was blocked from going to Tarp City—unless he wanted to take a chance on being arrested. To leave

the country would be a confession of his guilt and also leave some work undone.

"I can't go away and leave that sheep-herder alone," he reflected. "He's a liar, that's a cinch—and he tried to murder me. Still I've got to give him credit for bein' gentleman enough to not shoot me while I was tied up, I s'pose. But he ain't got no more idea where Gus Sinks is than I have—and I've got to find Gus Sinks."

He traveled back to the main road and headed for Tarp City, taking care to parallel the road instead of coming out into the open. For about a mile he watched the road closely, but could not find where the sheep had come back to it. Then he turned around and went back the other way, until he had gone a mile or more beyond where they had crossed the first time. Still there was no sign of their crossing.

Peace rode back to the creek, gave his horse a drink and sat down in the shade to have a smoke and wonder deeply what had become of his sheep. It was evident that they were not heading for Tarp City nor for the Fossilshell.

BUT Jim Horn was not willing to follow Cross L Marshall's advice and, "wait to see which way the pickle is goin' to squirt."

Jim was naturally of a suspicious nature, and, as soon as he was able, without attracting attention, he secured his horse and rode out of town, heading toward Poncho Pass. He wanted to know why Bender had ridden away ahead of Campion and his other two men.

About a mile out of town he saw a man walking down the road toward him. The man limped slightly and stopped as Jim rode up to him. It was the cattle-buyer who had ridden away with Campion, but was a stranger to Jim Horn.

The man's clothes were torn in several places and one of his hands was badly bruised. He seemed tired and there was an angry expression in his eyes, as Jim grinned at him.

"How far is it to Tarp City?" he demanded.

"Mile or so," said Jim, glancing back down the road.

The man swore openly and flexed his right knee.

"I lost my horse," he explained. "I'm a cattle-buyer."

He pointed back toward the hill.

"I went into the valley with a man named Campion—went in last night. We disagreed on prices; so I started back. Got lost, I reckon. Anyway, I got off my horse and it broke away from me.

"Horse belongs to the livery-stable at Tarp City. I've had a —— of a time gettin' here."

"Yeah, yuh sure look like yuh did," admitted Jim. "Kinda got off the road, didn't yuh?"

"I did. Skinned my hand and twisted my ankle."

"Well, yuh ain't far from Tarp City now, pardner."

"Glad of it. What outfit are you with?"

"Cross L."

"Over in the valley, eh? Sellin' any beef?"

"Mebbe." Jim turned in his saddle and pointed back down the road. "Old man Marshall is in Tarp City now. Yuh might ask him about it. He ain't in no mood to sell cows, but he might calm down long enough to talk business."

The cattle-buyer squinted thoughtfully and nodded.

"Much obliged. Well, I'll be hobblin' along. So long."

Jim nodded and rode on.

"So this was the cattle-buyer that went away with Campion," mused Jim. "Lost his horse and fell all over the landscape."

At the first curve in the road he looked back. The cattle-buyer was not in sight.

"Cripple ——!" exploded Jim. "Nothin' less than a foot-racer could get out of sight that quick."

He turned his horse and rode back at an easy gallop, but the crippled cattle-buyer had disappeared. Jim rode boldly back to where he had talked to the man and tracked him in the dusty road for about a hundred yards.

The man had stopped, shuffled his feet as he evidently looked toward Jim, but from there the tracks were not visible. Jim stared off into the brush, a queer expression in his eyes.

"Whatcha know about that?" he demanded of the whole wide world. "He won't find Tarp City down there in the brush. Mebbe he lost his rudder and can't steer himself."

But only a blue-jay's chattering broke the stillness. Jim shook his head and rode

back toward Tarp City, wondering why the man had taken to the brush.

Jim found Cross L and Bert Hart in the Royal saloon but did not tell them where he had been. Buck Houston was also in the saloon, when, according to precedent, he should be out in the hills looking for clues.

Barney McManus had looked upon the wine when it was very red and was in the proper condition to do battle with any one who dared say that Peace Parker was guilty of being anything. Buck Houston looked mildly upon Barney but said nothing. Barney was a good deputy. Houston gave no thought to Barney's resignation.

A little later the Claypool posse rode into town and invaded the Royal. They were dusty, tired and thirsty, but triumphant, to a certain degree.

"We didn't find our man," explained Claypool, a trifle thickly, "but we found his horse and saddle—dead."

"Who do yuh reckon killed the saddle?" queried Jim quickly, but Cross L shoved in closer to Claypool and demanded a detailed explanation.

With the assistance of several more of his men who all talked at once, Claypool managed to tell of how they had heard shooting and had found the dead horse. Of Peace they had seen nothing.

Cross L, Jim and Bert went outside and held an executive session. Claypool had told them where the dead horse had been found, and Cross L was in a hurry to investigate for himself.

Then Jim Horn told of his meeting with the cattle-buyer, while Cross L squinted wonderingly.

"What's the answer?" queried Bert. "Who in —— did Peace have the run-in with, I'd like to know?"

"Mebbe Claypool and his gang shot the horse," suggested Jim.

But Cross L shook his head.

"No, they didn't. If Claypool had 'a' done it he'd be braggin' his head off over it. There's somethin' goin' on that we don't know about. Yuh say the cattle-buyer was crippled, Jim?"

"Hurt his ankle, I reckon. Didn't look like that kind of a person either. Pers'nally, I think he's a liar when he says his horse got away from him and he got lost. By golly, he sure took back to the woods in a hurry."

"Yuh mean that he didn't look like the kind of a person that'd lose his horse and go fallin' around?"

"——, no! He ain't a young man but he's got a fightin' face. Chin as square as the end of a cigar-box and he ain't got no lips to speak about. Just a slit. And his nose kinda flares, like he'd been hit hard on the end of it."

Cross L rubbed the back of his head and squinted down at the ground.

"Yuh say he wanted to buy some beef from us, Jim?"

"He wanted to know if we had any. I told him to come down here and see you about it."

"Uh-huh."

Cross L grew thoughtful as he bit off a big chew of tobacco and dangled the plug in his hand.

Tony Laughlin came out of the Royal and Cross L accosted him.

"Tony, did you see that dead horse?"

"Yeah, I seen him, Marshall. Claypool said it was Parker's outfit. Black saddle, kinda plain-lookin', with a rawhide-covered horn and silver rivets."

"Gray horse?" queried Jim.

"Yeah. Branded with a Box M on the left shoulder."

"That's his animal," nodded Cross L. "Who do yuh think done it, Tony?"

"Good gosh, I dunno. We didn't see nobody."

Tony went on across the street and the three from the Cross L sat down on the sidewalk.

"Mebbe Peace is out there in the brush shot plumb full of holes," suggested Bert.

"Dry up!" exploded Cross L. "You ought to be a undertaker, Bert; you get such sweet thoughts."

"Well, you try guessin' for a while," advised Bert. "You ain't done nothin' yet, except curse a lot."

"Yeah, I s'pose I have cussed a lot, Bert." Cross L rubbed his chin slowly and his old eyes softened. "I've cussed a lot t'day. But I like Peace Parker so danged much that it makes me cuss to think he's havin' a hard time out there alone."

"Go ahead and cuss, if yuh feel like it," said Jim slowly. "I'll tell yuh a few cuss words that mebbe yuh don't know—and it might help us both."

"Ain't nothin' we can do, except cuss," admitted Bert. "It's goin' to be dark pretty

danged quick. Shall we go home or stay here until after supper?"

"Let's go home," suggested Cross L. "I ain't got no appetite—'less you fellers want to eat."

"I feel kinda dys-pep-tick," admitted Jim. "Let's hit the trail for the ranch. Saleratus'll get us some grub, if we're hungry."

They went to the hitch-rack and got their horses. Claypool and his men came out of the Royal saloon, talking loudly and headed for their horses.

"Let's not ride with that bunch of snake-hunters," said Cross L, as they mounted. "They're half-drunk and all loco."

The three from the Cross L left town at a stiff gallop, paying no attention to Claypool's men, who came up the road just behind them, but seemingly in no hurry.

The sun had long since gone down behind the mountain peaks, and the wide stretches of the hills were shrouded in the gloom of twilight. The three men rode swiftly along the grades, past the place where Jim Horn had met the cattle buyer, and into the sharp curves of the higher levels.

They were nearing the spot where the rocky hog-back opened the way to the secret pass, when Jim Horn jerked up on his horse and came to a full stop. The others drew rein with him and moved back to where he was standing in his stirrups, looking toward the secret pass.

"Whatcha see, Jim?" queried Cross L.

"Danged if I know, Cross L. Looks like a camp-fire, away up there in the peaks. Don'tcha see it?"

"I see it!" exclaimed Bert. "What in —— would anybody camp up there for?"

"I can see it now," agreed Cross L. "Looks like a fire, all right. Long ways up there."

As they sat there watching the tiny flicker, Claypool and his men rode up and questioned them.

"I'll betcha that's Peace Parker's camp-fire!" blurted one of the cowboys.

"Not out in the open," replied Jim Horn. "Peace is no fool."

Claypool moved around until he could lean close to Cross L.

"Marshall, that fire is pretty danged close to the little pass, ain't it?"

"Yeah, I've been thinkin' it is," nodded Marshall.

"Well, I'm goin' to find out what it is," declared Claypool. "If it don't affect the pass, we don't need to show the way to the whole gang. Come on."

Claypool whirled his horse and spoke to his men.

"We're goin' up there and see what it's all about."

He spurred his horse up the rocky point, and all the rest followed him, their horses scrambling along, kicking a shower of rocks back onto the grade. Cross L and his two men were just as anxious to find out what it meant, so they urged their horses up through the brush and mixed with the others.

The going was not easy. Darkness was fast covering the mountain slopes, and there was danger of a rider slipping over the rim of the deep cañons. Mile after mile they urged their horses, climbing higher and higher toward the tiny flame.

There was little conversation, as each rider was on the alert, and there was little sound, except the creak of saddles, jingling of bit-chains and the scraping of shod hoofs on the rocky ledges.

PEACE PARKER had spent considerable time on the bank of the little stream, trying to puzzle out what it all meant. His mind was jumbled with the happenings of the last twelve hours; jumbles, which, as yet, he was unable to connect close enough to plan out his next move.

The sun was going down when he got to his feet and led his horse down to the creek for a drink. Then he swung into the saddle and rode cautiously back to the shack where he had been imprisoned.

There was no one in sight around there. He swung in a wide circle, examining the ground closely for sheep-tracks. Then he found where the herd had traveled, and a pucker came between his eyes, as he squinted at the brush-covered slope of the mountains.

Back and forth he led his horse, looking closely at the tracks. Here and there a thorny bush had lifted tufts of wool from the sheep, and it was easy to follow them. They were all heading into the hills.

Then Peace mounted his horse, swung the rifle across the saddle-fork in front of him and started up the mountain.

There could be only one possible destination for that flock of sheep, and that was the secret pass.

"They're shovin' 'em in through the little pass!" he gasped. "They're goin' to make another try at puttin' the woollies into the valley of the Chinook—and they're hours ahead of me! Come on, bronc!"

Peace knew what it would mean to Chinook. The law had already been tested and the sheep had been given equal rights with other stock. Possession of the range—not outright ownership—and its inaccessibility had been the salvation of the cattle-ranges of the Chinook, but Peace knew that if one big band of sheep ever invaded that domain the law would follow the recent precedent and in a short time the valley would be sheeped-out.

There were no fences, except those at the home ranches—no way of stopping that gray wave of grass-destroying herbivore, if once they gained the down-slopes.

It was a long climb up that mountain side. There were no trails, nothing to guide him. But beyond and beyond was the wool-tipped brush where the sheep had climbed ahead of him.

Darkness came down, but still the jaded animal climbed up through the broken rock, brush, down-timber, while Peace urged it continually, and swore roundly when it was forced to detour around the upper cliffs.

Then he saw the flicker of the fire beyond him. It was, as near as he could judge, very close to the rocky defile which led in through the cliffs. He drew rein and listened. A breeze was sighing through the pines, and to his ears came the distant bleating of sheep.

He rode on toward the cliffs. Suddenly his horse shied and almost fell. It was a tired sheep lying on the side of the hill that frightened the horse. The sheep tried to get up, but fell back. The drive had been too severe. There were more further on, standing in a huddle against the side of a rock—a feast for the coyotes.

Peace swore softly, swung the gun in one hand and urged his horse onward. There were men around the fire and just beyond them he could see another man, who was blocking the sheep from swinging to the right, and sending them into the rocky defile.

The sheep were bleating pitifully and were hardly strong enough to clamber up the last incline. Peace tried to shout to the men at the fire, but before he could fill his lungs with air, one of the men fired a rifle.

But this did not stop Peace. He was not going to stop for anything now. The men were running toward the cleft in the rocks. Another rifle shot echoed and re-echoed among the cliffs. The sheep were running hither and yon, as Peace spurred up the last incline, swinging his rifle in one hand.

The horse stumbled and almost fell, but Peace yanked its head up and roweled it deeply, and as it sprang forward something struck Peace a tremendous blow and he fell sideways off his horse into the rocks.

He dimly realized that he had been shot, but felt no pain. He did not even feel the shock of his fall into the rocks. He heard voices—many voices—but they were so muddled that he could not distinguish a single one.

Some one was holding a light over him, and he wanted to grin, but his facial muscles seemed stiff. Then he heard Claypool's voice saying:

"——tell yuh he tried to herd his —— sheep into the valley."

Again the muddled roar of voices. He managed to turn his eyes enough to look up into the face of Cross L Marshall. Some-one was holding a light. He wanted to tell old Cross L that everything was all right, but he could not speak.

Cross L had turned and was speaking now:

"He's hurt bad, boys. Arguin' ain't goin' to get us nowhere. Yes, they're his sheep. We've got to get him to a doctor."

"We'll git him to jail!" It was Mike O'Neil who made this declaration. "We'll fix that dirty pup!"

Came a sudden movement, the sound of a blow and a chorus of voices, arguing angrily. Then Jim Horn's voice, half-crying with anger:

"Yes, and I'll break his nose agin', if he opens his mouth. And if you want any of it, Barill, I'll hand you the same dose."

Peace grinned internally. He knew that Jim Horn had hit Mike O'Neil in the nose and was promising the same thing to Sam Barill, the gun-man. It was good to have such friends.

"All right," said Claypool reluctantly. "We'll tie him on in front of somebody. Mebbe he'll live to the bottom of the hill and mebbe he won't. Don't make much diff——"

Claypool's discourse was broken by a sud-den *splat*, and Cross L's voice crowed triumphantly:

"I've been goin' to do it to you for a long time, Claypool. My foot slipped, or I'd 'a' hit yuh harder."

"That was hard enough, —— knows," drawled Sorensen. "He won't wake up for an hour. Didja hit him with a rock?"

"M' fist!" grunted Cross L. "Mebbe it's hard as a rock. I've had it doubled up all day and it's likely petrified."

Some one laughed nervously, and Claypool's voice began weak inquiries, which no one seemed to think worth answering. Two of the men lifted Peace up, while another led up a horse.

"Rope him good and tight," ordered Claypool painfully, in a weak voice.

The cowboys quickly tied Peace to the saddle, while another climbed up behind him. Peace was beginning to have more sensation of pain now. The back of his head ached throbbingly and his shoulder felt like a red-hot iron was being drawn forth and back across it.

They rode out to where the mountain sloped off into the valley, and Sorensen gave some of the cowboys orders to round up the sheep as quickly as possible and send them back through the pass.

Cross L rode close to Peace, as though to guard him from Claypool and O'Neil, who were talking in undertones of what they were going to do to Peace Parker. Jim Horn cursed them bitterly, and at times it seemed that open warfare was about to break out, but Chris Sorensen begged them to drop their quarrel for the time being.

Peace gradually recovered the use of his legs and arms and his brain became alert again, but he said nothing. He realized that the evidence was against him. Claypool and his men had not seen the men at the fire and thought that Peace was the one who had fired the shots at them.

They traveled down the long slopes to the road where they bunched and quickened their pace.

"Take him to my place," suggested Cross L. "We can send for Doctor Glover."

"Thasall right," agreed Claypool, "but some of us will stay there with him, y'betcha."

Cross L spat a curse that would make a cotton-tail attack a rattlesnake, but Claypool remained silent. He had been hit hard—too hard to want it to happen again.

They rode in at the Cross L and carried Peace into the house. Jess met them at the door and her face went white at her glimpse of Peace. His head and face were a mass of gore and his eyes were closed.

They placed him on a couch in the living-room and one of the cowboys mounted and rode swiftly after the doctor. Cross L went to Jess and put an arm around her shoulder.

"Is he hurt bad?" she whispered anxiously.

"I reckon so, Jess. We ain't had no chance to examine him, but he sure does look bad. He ain't spoke."

Saleratus Smith came in from the kitchen, stared around at the circle of hard-bitted men and strode over to the couch.

"Who in —— done this?" he demanded hotly.

He turned and looked at the men. O'Neil's nose was swollen from Jim Horn's fist and Claypool's right cheek and eye were an indigo in the light from the oil lamp.

"We don't know who done it, Saleratus," said Jim slowly. "There was several shots fired at him."

Saleratus squinted closely at the men, but no one seemed to offer an explanation. He leaned over and turned Peace's head slightly as he inspected the wound. His body blocked the crowd from Peace's head, and Peace's lips whispered a short sentence, although his eyes did not open.

Saleratus squinted closer for a moment and straightened up.

"I'm goin' to wash him off a little bit," he announced. "It can't hurt him none and it'll make him look better. That bullet burned plumb across his shoulder and knocked a hunk off the back of his head. Mebbe it didn't go into him, but it sure looks bad."

"Hop to it," said Cross L. "It's the least we can do."

Saleratus headed into the kitchen, and Jess drew her father aside. In a few words he told her all that he knew about it.

"They'll hang that bank robbery on to him, Jess," whispered Cross L, after he had told of the shooting at the pass. "I'll back him with every cent I've got, but it sure looks bad, I tell yuh."

"Maybe they can't prove it," breathed Jess. "He left here because of Frank Campion, didn't he? Dad, I told Frank Campion that I was engaged to Peace, but he kept coming. And—and Peace didn't seem to care. I knew that Campion was a liar when he wrote that note to me.

"Peace never whipped him because he was jealous. It was not like Peace. One day Frank came to see me and he had been drinking enough to make him boastful. He said that the people of Chinook Valley were too clannish for him, and that he was going to make them eat out of his hand before he got through. And I—I wanted to find out how he was going to do it, dad."

"He said that did he, Jess?"

Cross L squinted thoughtfully. Saleratus Smith was coming back with a basin of hot water and a towel. He placed the pan on the floor and leaned over Peace, holding the wrapped towel in his right hand.

Shielding his action as much as possible, he unrolled the towel and exposed a heavy Colt six-shooter, which he slipped into Peace's hand. No one saw the thing done, and as Saleratus knelt down to pick up the pan of water, Peace straightened up in bed, covering the crowd with the gun.

They were too amazed to even move, as he slid off the couch, the gun tensed at his hip, and backed swiftly toward the open door.

"Peace!" gasped Cross L. "Peace you ain't—well, I'll be ——ed!"

"Hold still," gritted Peace. "Claypool, if you reach for that gun, you'll draw a harp or a shovel. Cross L, you shut the door behind me, if yuh will."

Swiftly he backed out of the door and Cross L stumbled across the rumpled rug and shut the door. Then he stood with his back against it, laughing foolishly.

"—— you; git away from that door!" shrilled Claypool, covering Cross L with his gun. "Come on, boys; we'll git him!"

Cross L stepped aside from the menace of Claypool's gun, and O'Neil flung the door wide for the rush of men.

"There he goes!" yelled Tony Laughlin. "He's headin' down the road!"

"Yeah, and he'll lead you snake-hunters a merry chase!" yelled Saleratus, as they mounted swiftly.

Cross L and the two cowboys joined in the chase, but not to help catch him, while Saleratus danced a jig on the rug and managed to upset the pan of hot water.

"Where did he get the gun, Saleratus?" gasped Jess.

"From me! I almost swallered m' wisdom-teeth when he whispered for me to get him a gun."

And without any preliminary action, Jess flung her arms around Saleratus' neck and kissed him. He jerked back, staring at her, while his hand went uncertainly to his lips.

"That is for giving him that gun," said Jess.

"My ——!" exploded Saleratus. "You—uh—huh! Say!"

He slapped himself on the thigh and stared at her.

"You kissed me for givin' him that gun? For givin' him one little solitary gun?"

"Yes, Saleratus."

"My gosh, that's hard luck!"

"Why what do you mean?"

"Mean?" Saleratus pointed toward the kitchen door.

"Why, I've got another six-gun, a rifle and a sawed-off shotgun in there—and I only gave him one little solitary six-gun!"

Saleratus slapped himself on the leg again, picked up his empty pan and bow-legged his way into the kitchen, chuckling joyfully.

Down the road swept the riders, heading toward Pasiooks, urging their tired horses to a killing pace. Peace had taken Tony Laughlin's horse, which was reputed to be a runner, and Tony was riding double with Sam Barill.

Just beyond the Three Dot gate they met the cowboy, who had gone after the doctor. He was riding back to tell them that the doctor was at the Crescent Ranch, farther up the valley.

"Where did you meet Peace Parker?" questioned Claypool breathlessly. "He got away from us on Laughlin's horse."

"Got away? I never met him."

"He left the road, that's a cinch!" exploded O'Neil. "I'll bet he went through the Three Dot gate."

They whirled their horses and rode swiftly back. The Three Dot ranch-house set back about two hundred yards from the main road. A light shown dully through the shade in a front window, but the rest of the place was a black huddle of barns and corrals.

A horse crossed the road near the house and one of the cowboys whirled in close to it.

"Here's his horse!" he called. "This is Tony's horse!"

"Well, we've got him on foot," crowed Claypool, as they dismounted.

"One of yuh stay with the horses," ordered O'Neil. "We don't want to lose him ag'in."

Swiftly they walked up to the ranch-house and O'Neil knocked on the door, which was opened by Frank Campion. He stared at the crowd of men wonderingly. In the center of the room, three more men were sitting at a table, playing cards, and some one was softly picking a banjo.

"Seen anythin' of Peace Parker?" asked O'Neil.

"Peace Parker?" Campion's voice sounded like he was suffering from a bad cold. "Why, I don't know what you mean?"

"He came this way," explained Claypool, without giving a thought to the fact that Campion had not been in any position to know what it all meant.

"He took Tony's bronc, but we found it out here."

"Aw, ——! He don't know what we're talkin' about," said Sam Barill who realized that Campion had not been with them.

"I sure don't," grinned Campion. "Wish I did."

"Yuh do, eh?" Cross L had moved in close to the door and was looking at the card-players.

One of them was the cattle-buyer and his hands moved uncertainly on the table as he looked up and saw Cross L's face framed in the door-way.

"Where abouts in —— did you come from?" said Cross L slowly, speaking directly at the cattle-buyer.

The man only continued to stare while the rest of the crowd outside, sensing something out of the ordinary, tried to crowd into the doorway. Frank Campion moved aside, but his right hand dropped close to his holstered gun.

"You I'm talkin' about."

Cross L pointed directly at the cattle-buyer. "You low-born, insignificant, bat-eared, block-jawed tattle-tale!"

Still the man did not move. The crowd moved in closer, which shoved Cross L into the room. Bender and Erne were at the table with the cattle-buyer, but now they slid their chairs slightly away.

On a couch sat Mehl, sprawled at ease, while near him sat the scar-faced sheep-herder, fingering the banjo.

"Yes, yuh know me," continued Cross L. "Yo're Joe Campion, and if you had the guts of a chickadee you'd reach for your gun."

"What's it about, Cross L?" queried Jim. "You know that jasper? He's the feller that lost his horse and fell down all over the hills. Say—" speaking to the cattle-buyer— "why didja duck into the brush, instead of going on into Tarp City?"

"He knowed I was there," said Cross L coldly. "And he knowed I was jist kinda livin' along, waiting for a chance to drill his dirty hide full of holes."

"I don't *sabe* how he got here," complained Jim Horn. "Mebbe he got lost ag'in and traveled in a circle."

"This ain't gettin' Peace Parker," reminded Claypool. "What the —— do we care about Cross L's personal affairs?"

Claypool turned toward the door, but stopped in his tracks. Just inside was Peace Parker, his face still covered with blood, but his mouth was grinning widely. He was not pretty to see. Campion sidled toward the couch, watching Peace closely.

None of the men who had been hunting him made any move toward him. Peace held a six-shooter at his side and his eyes took in the men at the table, Frank Campion and the two men on the couch. The cattle-buyer moved his feet slowly, as if getting read to move quickly.

"Well, we're all together at last," said Peace slowly.

His voice sounded tired and a twinge of pain crossed his bloody face.

"It's been quite some day, hasn't it?" he continued. "It sure—you scar-faced person with the banjo; keep yore hands on the banjo. You ain't even a good liar, Campion. I wondered why you follered me across the secret pass that night I shot the gun out of yore hand in Tarp City, but I found out the reason."

"I don't know what you mean?" Campion spoke softly.

"You knew there was another way into the valley, but yuh didn't know where it was. Rather than have trouble with you and yore men, I went that way and you trailed me.

"Then you took that cattle-buyer in that way."

Peace pointed at the square-jawed man at the table, and the men around Peace shuffled uneasily.

"I went through Poncho Pass into the valley and up to the secret pass from this side. I seen Bender, Erne and Mehl meet you two and yuh all rode away down the right-hand side of the mountain."

Campion tried to smile, but it faded quickly and he assumed a belligerent attitude.

"What in —— are you talking about, Parker? This is all Greek to me."

"He's plumb loco," observed the scar-faced man.

"Yeah?"

Peace's eyes shifted to the sheepherder.

"You killed my horse and tried to kill me, pardner. You got scared of the posse that was after me and pulled out—"Peace, without turning his head, spoke back to Claypool—"I was under that shack floor when you fellers found my horse, Claypool."

"That's what the shootin' was about, eh?" queried O'Neil.

"Yeah. That scar-faced jasper shot my horse and planted a scheme to murder me in a gentlemanly manner, but his plans went all wrong. He'll pay for that."

"I never shot at yuh after I shot yore horse," denied the scar-faced man whiningly. "It—uh—I took the sheep——"

"—— you, shut up!" snapped Frank Campion hoarsely.

"Anyway, he spoke his piece," grinned Peace. "I creased his horse and he took a header into the brush. Mebbe he thought the horse was dead, but it wasn't. It's the one I got shot off from up in the little pass. It belongs to the livery-stable at Tarp City."

"You—uh—say!" exploded Jim. "That must 'a' been the cattle-buyer. No wonder he hurt himself."

"Say, what's it all about?" demanded Claypool.

It was all going to fast for him.

"It means," said Peace slowly, "that they stole my herd of sheep from Sun Prairie and tried to bring 'em into the valley through the little pass. I got there just in time to get shot by you fellers."

"And that's Frank Campion's father," said Cross L, pointing toward the table. "I reckon he wanted to sheep out the valley on my account."

"Yes, and —— you, we nearly done it, too!" rasped the elder Campion. "I've been layin' for you a long time, Marshall. I served four years on yore account. That sheriff nailed me with the cattle, and you sent him."

"Yo're danged right I did!" exploded Cross L. "You had him hoodle me out of town and I got even with yuh."

"But we didn't steal your sheep, Parker," Campion's voice seemed stronger. "We've got a bill-of-sale from Gus Sinks. That lets us out."

"Yeah?" Peace braced his legs a trifle. "Yuh say it lets yuh out? I think it lets yuh in, Campion. I read that bill-of-sale, and it's wrote in the same hand-writin' that was on the note you sent to Jess Marshall."

"My ——!" exploded Cross L. "Is that a fact?"

Peace nodded quickly, and Campion's face went white.

"You can't cinch nobody on that kind of evidence," he croaked.

Peace ignored him and looked at the scar-faced man who was getting uncomfortable.

"You talked too much," said Peace. "You knowed Gus Sinks too well. Fact of the matter is, you knowed that he had a scar on his face and one finger missin'—and he ain't got no such a thing."

The sheep-herder swallowed painfully and looked down at the toes of his boots.

"Maybe you can prove that?" said Frank Campion sneeringly.

Peace nodded.

"Yeah, I think I can. In fact, I think that you know him well enough to know he ain't got a scar on his face nor a missin' finger."

"Me?"

Campion screwed up his face, as though something pained him.

"How in —— would I know?"

"He's about yore size," observed Peace slowly. "That day I took him to Pasiooks, I thought he knowed you. Yuh see, yore hired sheep-herder over there with the banjo, said that him and Gus had this deal all framed, but Gus never knowed there was a bank in Pasiooks until I took him there, and the robbery was the next day."

"What's this got to do with me?" demanded Campion angrily. "You come here and talk like a fool and——"

"The queer part of it all is the fact that poor old Gus never got out of the valley," continued Peace. "You helped watch the Pass, Campion; and you knew he couldn't come out."

"I knew he couldn't?" Campion's voice squeaked.

"You knowed —— well he couldn't!"

Peace had lost his bloody grin and his mouth looked like a white scar across his face.

"You stopped him out there on the road

that day he was comin' back from the bank, Campion. You invited him in here. You knew Gus Sinks."

"Prove it!" panted Campion. "—— you, prove it!"

Campion's eyes flashed sideways to Bender and Erne, but they were making no move that might assist him.

"You took his clothes, gun, horse and saddle away from him, Campion," Peace's voice sounded as harsh and metallic as a voice from a phonograph. "You —— crook, you wore his clothes and robbed the bank yourself and threw the blame onto him. Oh, Gus!"

Came the sound of a soft step and Gus Sinks came in through the door behind them. But he was a queer looking badman. Around his naked body was wrapped a dirty horse-blanket, and beneath his matted hair grinned the pinched, drawn face of a man who had suffered deeply.

Every one, except Peace and Cross L, had turned at the sound, and Frank Campion took his long chance. His hand came up like a flash, holding his six-shooter, but Peace was looking for the move and his gun thundered from his hip.

Campion spun around, groping with his left hand for support, but still trying to pull the trigger. The elder Campion flung back his chair and tried to pull a gun from beneath his coat, but into him went Cross L Marshall, bellowing a battle-cry and they went down together in a tangle of overturned table and splintered chair.

The scar-faced gentleman flung himself backward off the couch, clawing for his gun; but Jim Horn did a high-dive across the couch and knocked all the fight out of him in a moment. Campion swayed around, still holding the gun, but did not have strength enough to pull the trigger, until Peace stepped in and took it away from him.

Bender, Mehl and Erne elevated their hands and decided to take a chance with the law. It had all happened in a very few seconds of time, and Campion had barely fallen across the couch when the cowboys were producing lariat ropes to secure the prisoners.

"My gosh, they're still fightin'!" exploded Jim Horn. "Hey, Cross L! Ain't you about through?"

"Go-o-o-sh dud—darn him!" panted Cross L. "I've waited a—long—time—for—this! Danged block-jawed, bat-eared ——! Got enough?"

Cross L got to his feet and let the battered Campion get up. Cross L had done his work well, although he had not escaped entirely. The elder Campion swayed on his feet and blinked dazedly.

"I've lived for this," declared Cross L. "Yessir, I've clung to life just for this one moment. Dang yuh, that's twice I've licked yuh. Now answer me, you quitter. Did yuh ever see that girl agin'? The one we fought about?"

The man blinked painfully and spoke hoarsely through swollen lips:

"Yeah. She waited for me, Marshall—waited four years. She was Frank's mother. She died—when—he—was—born."

"Aw-w-w!"

Marshall rubbed the back of his hand across his face and shook his head slowly. Then he turned to Peace.

"Let's go home, cowboy. Dang it all, I'm tired of fightin'. It don't get yuh nothin', does it?"

Peace shook his head and turned toward the door. But the men who had hunted him blocked him from the doorway and wanted to shake his hand. Gus Sinks stood apart from the rest, a pathetic figure in his dirty blanket, unmoved by what had just happened.

"Peace, I want to shake hands with yuh," said Claypool contritely. "We come near doin' yuh a bad wrong."

The rest of them crowded in, but Peace made no move to shake hands.

"You didn't have no faith," he told them softly. "You was too willin' to see the bad side of things. Yuh all knew me, but just the same yuh didn't have no faith in me. Poor old Gus, over there, told me he knowed I'd come. He had a lot of faith in me, even if he was hid away and all roped up in the root-house. If I'd 'a' lost faith in Gus, you'd 'a' been sheeped out and I'd a been hidin' out the rest of my life."

"I told Campion you'd come," nodded Gus. "But he didn't have no faith either."

Peace grinned widely and started for the door, with the Cross L outfit and Gus Sinks trailing behind him. At the horses, Cross L touched Peace on the arm.

"Peace, I had a talk with Jess t'night, while you was on that couch. She thinks you don't care, I reckon. Campion got full

of hooch one day and told her he was going to make this valley eat out of his hand, and so she thought she might be able to find out what he meant."

"She wasn't goin' to marry him, Cross L?"

"Well, I should say not! She thought you didn't want to marry her, Peace!"

"Uh-huh," said Peace softly, thoughtfully. "Well, Cross L, I reckon there's all kinds of faith in the world. I kinda doubted her and she doubted me, but when yuh straighten out a couple of real good doubts thataway—it ought to build up a —— of a lot of faith, don'tcha think?"

"I've got a hunch that it will," said Cross L thankfully. "I've got a —— big hunch that it will, Peace."

"Well, that's faith. Let's go home."

by Eugene Cunningham

Author of "The Fifty-Sixth Immortal," "Forty Thousand B. P.," etc.

THERE, *señor!* Upon that hilltop yonder, that rears above the jungle thickness, just half-way between my village of Santa Ana and the town of San Anselmo, Miguel will meet us with his horses. Doubtless he is already waiting, since yesterday my *patron* sent word to San Anselmo. So, soon you will go on with Miguel, while I turn back to Santa Ana with these animals.

It would be most pleasant to go with you, *señor!* I am twenty-four, yet never have I been outside of Costa Rica; never more than thirty miles from my village. *You* will go on, to Nicaragua, then to Honduras, Salvador—even to Guatemala! *Dios mio!* What a traveling you will have had when you are once more in the United States. Why, even Don Pelaya, my *patron*, who is a very rich man, has never been farther than San José, the capital.

Slowly, *señor!* Slowly! The hill-trail is steep. See how my fat, white *mula* bunches her haunch-muscles? Let your pony choose its own gait upon the slope, then upon the level it is for the rider to set the pace. So runs the proverb, which came to Costa Rica with the horses of the *conquistadores*. See; we are upon the hilltop, yet the beasts breathe easily. But— Now, where is that rascal, Miguel? A —— for slowness, Miguel! Never does he come to the place he says he will come, until long past the time he has said will be the time! We must wait, *señor*, for beyond, the trail forks thrice.

Now, *señor*, why frown at Antonio? *I* did not make this delay. You *Norte Americanos* are well-named *machos*—he-mules—by my people. You see nothing but the goal you have set yourself; so you miss the fair flowers by the way. Look! Is not the sky a bowl of clearest blue above our heads,

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**This is an Off-the-Trail story. See note at foot of first contents page.*

its edges resting upon the misty mountain-tops? And the grass! Why, the emeralds of the Incas were no greener. See how the *roble de sabana*, the oak of the plain, carpets the slopes with delicate pink blossoms. Far to westward, that shining gray shield beyond the jungle-top is the mighty Pacific.

There is sugar-cane in my saddle-bags; if the *señor* will condescend to accept a joint— Is it not pleasant, merely to lie here upon the grass and feel the breeze that blows from the ocean? Of a certainty, Miguel should have been here; but since he is not and we may not, by wishing, bring him, why fret? Sometimes I think that the good God did not intend men to hurry too much. If they did, they might reach Heaven—or Purgatory—before the appointed time. *Sí, señor!* Even poor Antonio Ruiz may have his fancies! Now, I should be most grateful, *señor*, if you would tell me of your country, the great United States— The scar upon my cheek? Now, the *señor* has sharp eyes! Few notice it unless I am in wrath; then it gleams white indeed.

Sí, señor! If you insist, there is a tale. Tell it? I had intended to; it is only that I wonder how to begin. I am but Antonio Ruiz, a poor peon, without any experience of that vast world which lies beyond the frontiers of Costa Rica. Cunning words, the trick of marshaling them, so that pictures of my thoughts may form clearly before the hearer's eyes—those I have not. For yet another reason speech comes haltingly: Even the poorest peon, *señor*, is a man. To him, as to others, come those heart-pounding moments when in his quickened mind he feels himself truly a brother of Earth's greatest. Why, he is born; he loves; he hates; he fights his enemy; he dies. Now, can even the kings do more? It seems to me that the difference between king and peon lies only in the manner of doing. But when a man comes to tell of his great memories, his words are gone—like strayed cattle into the jungle; he must first find them.

This scar that splits my cheek from forehead to jawbone like the shadow of a serpent's tongue, came to me because once I loved a girl—loved the most beautiful girl in all the world. *Milgracias!* I thank you for the cigaret. Tobacco is truly the magic plant; pictures come and go in the smoke-cloud one blows upward; come and go in the brain, as well— So now I see a face!

It was in my village of Santa Ana, *señor*, from which we rode this morning. She was Rosa Perez, an orphan. So she lived with her cousin, Maria, in the house of Maria's dead man. Five children had Maria, all girls, the eldest four years old. Maria was fat and old—oh! thirty years, at least, had Maria! Her tongue was sharp as my machete; all day long the village heard her calling shrilly to the five little ones, or scolding Rosa. A hard woman, Maria.

But Rosa! Ah, Santa Maria— See that tiny bird that hovers above the sugar-cane, its feathers like the gleam of firelight upon smooth water? So was my Rosa! Of a tininess and slim beauty. Quickness like that of the humming-bird she had, and only fifteen years. When I found her at the stream getting water in Maria's great earthen jar, and tried to kiss her, never could I catch her—until she stopped, laughing, tossing back her soft, black hair, to let me put my hands upon her shoulders. Then would she put up smiling red lips—once. But one kiss a day might I have.

Afterward we walked back to the village together, she going before with the jar upon her head, I following, because I loved to watch the slimness of her, swaying gently to balance the water-jar, the little bare feet seeming to touch the path no more than the bird's beak touches the cane-pith yonder. We talked of marriage and of the house my *patron*, Don Pelaya, was to give me the next year when I began to work all the time for him.

We were poor—most poor, *señor!* Don Pelaya, from whom you hired these animals, is very rich. He owns the store in Santa Ana; he buys and sells many horses and cattle. He was very good to me, but still I had not more than ten colones saved. But the next year Don Pelaya would give me a little patch of land for maize and beans and plantains. We would build our cabin and live happily. Some day, when we were very, very rich, we might even get a cow! We talked of all these things, walking back to the village from the stream.

Then, one day— See how the humming-bird, having stayed with us awhile, now darts away? So, *señor*, was it with Rosa! One day—I lost her— Let me smoke for a moment *señor*, until I see how to tell.

It was an Englishman, the manager of the great mine across the hills from Santa Ana. A tall, handsome man, red-faced,

with hair the color of ripe maize and eyes no lighter than the sky yonder. He was forever laughing, very loud and joyous, so that one felt like laughing with him. Many times I watched him ride up to the store of my good *patron* and sit upon his black stallion to talk of horses. He and Don Pelaya would bargain for an hour, then the big man would cry out to Don Pelaya that he was master horse-thief of the world. Then both would laugh very loudly. I, hearing from inside the store where I worked, would laugh, also. At first, I mean, before the Englishman saw my Rosa. After that I laughed no more, but called down black curses upon his yellow head.

For when first he laid his blue eyes upon my darling she stood washing clothes in the stream, pounding them clean upon the stones. Her skirts were turned back so that the red petticoat showed above her slender ankles; her arms were bare to the soft roundness of her shoulders.

Santa Maria! I was hidden in the bushes upon the bank, making courage to steal down upon her and snatch a second kiss that day, she was so lovely. Then a horse splashed into the water at the ford; halted. I heard the Englishman's loud voice crying out that God was very good and that *he* had evidently been smitten until now with blindness. Rosa, my pretty one, she smiled toward him. I moved very softly, as I would go to seek a deer at the drinking-place, until I could see them both. The Englishman asked for water and held out a bright cup. Rosa came to his stirrup and took it, then brought him clear water from above the washing-stones. Many times she rinsed the cup before she would be content.

He drank and handed her back the cup, while I stood watching with more of hurt here inside my breast than if a machete had chopped into my living heart. *Nombre de Dios!* I hurt greatly!

She took the cup again, and he bent low from the saddle and said that the beautiful cup was for her, in return for the drink—and a kiss. Suddenly he lifted her to his lips and while she struggled—but not half so hard as with me!—he took, not one, but a dozen kisses. Then he set her down. They both laughed, but with a trembling in the laughter.

Señor, that was but the beginning. I spoke to Rosa and she said that she could do nothing against the Englishman's great strength. But—after that she kissed me less often; her struggles against my arms became real struggles. Against the Englishman's kisses—for now he rode there almost daily—she struggled very little. As I watched—for I watched much, then—she came to kiss him, also. When I spoke to her of this she grew angry and reminded me that not yet had she taken vows to make me her man.

Sí! That was but the beginning. If it hurt so, consider how the pain of the ending must have been! On a certain day I lay hidden in the bushes upon the bank of the stream, watching them as they sat upon a great stone across the water from me. She nestled in his arms and warned him—against me! He laughed when she said that surely would I do him an injury.

"See, little heart of mine!" he said to her. Then his hand dropped to the long, black pistol at his side. As the magic-working men at the *fiestas* bring young pigs from a sombrero, so was brought that long pistol from its sheath. Six times, before I could draw a long breath, he pulled the trigger. A white log that lay very near to my left hand was pierced six times. Splinters flew into my face as I crouched there. After they had gone I looked at the holes. *Señor!* I could cover them all with my palm! A very —— at the shooting was that Englishman. But yes!

Then the next morning Don Pelaya sent me with a message to the *hacienda* of the Señor Torres, a day's ride to the south. When I returned to Santa Ana, at nightfall of the next day, she—was gone. My Rosa was gone; gone; gone——

I cursed. From my head I tore the hair in handfuls. My fingers grew hooked like beast-claws. I could see her in the Englishman's arms. The picture was ever before me. Fire was in my veins, I thought, not blood. A red haze was before my eyes—but through it I saw plainly; saw her in his arms.

Maria, her cousin, laughed like a she-devil. She told me all. Rosa had gone with the Englishman; she would never come back. Never.

"*Valgame Dios!*" cried Maria with anger at me. "Why should she not? There are a thousand beautiful things in his house. He will give her many pretty dresses—even shoes and stockings, such as she has never worn! Think of it! She will be a fine lady,

your Rośita. Ha! I would have gone, too, had I such a chance! Why should she stay here, imbecile, to cook and wash and slave and bear the children of a poor thickhead, a fool like you? Get out! Sob in the street! Out, I say!"

So she drove me out. I could say only, "she was mine; mine; mine!" Over and over I said it. But presently I began to plan. My brain from being flaming-hot turned cold, very, very cold. I drew my machete from its sheath—so! Like a snake it flicked out, three feet long, sharp-edged, gleaming in the moonlight like a tiger's eyes.

I began to run. From Santa Ana, the town, to Santa Ana, the mine, is three leagues over the hills, but I swear that I ran every step. Thought of my revenge upon this tall yellow-haired thief made me tireless. I ran over the narrow white trail, thinking nothing of the beasts in the dark jungle that walls in that path. Once a panther screamed, far back in the thickets. *Señor!* I swear that I answered him so fiercely, with such a roar, that he screamed no more! But always I ran on, ran until I could see the little village of the miners huddled upon the slope below me. Through this village I passed and came softly up the hill to the big house of the manager upon the hilltop above the shaft-mouth.

Down in the second valley the stamp-machine sounded—*thud-thud-thud*—in the still air. It pounded in my ears, saying, "death-death-death!"

There was light in the Englishman's house, light in every window. Like a hungry jaguar I circled the house, staring in at every window. Then I found them! They sat upon a long thing like a bench—but larger—covered with red cloth. Her head lay upon his shoulder. Her eyes were closed, and she smiled; upon her face was the expression I had seen there in my fancy, but now it was different—the admission of possessedness was made to him, not me. By every shadow that played upon her face she was saying—

"I am yours."

So I stood staring through the window. With the sight of Rosa, cradled in his arm, that coldness left me; once more I knew a longing for her, a madness at the thought of another taking her, which burned like fever, left me shaking as with the chill that comes with malaria. The voice of the stamp-machine cried louder and ever louder in my ears, "death-death-death!"

It was my plan to wait until they were asleep. So I crouched beneath the window and hugged to me my machete, keeping my thumb upon its thin edge. When all the house was dark and silent, then would I steal in and with two great strokes leave them headless! *Dios mio!* How my head swam; how red was the mist before my eyes——

I could not stay so, without seeing. Once more I peered through the window. Rosa moved; her eyes opened and she shivered as if a chill breeze from the mountains touched her bare breast. She wore a loose robe of soft, pink stuff, the name of which I do not know. I have never seen another. This she pulled tight about her, still shivering. The big Englishman smiled down upon her.

"Cold, little one?" he asked.

Then she gripped him tight, her breast close against him.

"It is Antonio!" she cried. "I fear greatly. He will come and kill you!"

He laughed—that loud laugh that made my teeth grind together. One big hand he slapped against the long pistol still swinging at his belt.

"Fear not, heart of my heart. This good friend never leaves me and I sleep like the *coyote solo*—the fierce lone wolf—with one eye always open. Should Antonio come—well, the poor boy would soon need masses."

Señor, as I stood there outside the window, staring up at the yellow moon in the black sky above me, I knew that the Englishman spoke truth. Never could I come close enough to bring down the machete in that death-stroke my father taught me. Always would he have that pistol ready, the pistol with which he could perform tricks such as make the magic-workers at the shows in *fiesta*-time. Squatting outside the house, with my machete across my knees, both coldness and fierce heat of rage burned out within me, I knew that neither Rosa nor my revenge could be mine.

Memories; thoughts of past and future; these whirled in my poor head as I stared straight ahead into the darkness. I was not afraid to die; Heaven must be a beautiful place. Sometimes, as I lie upon my back upon such a hilltop, at such a time as this, I watch the soft clouds curling across the sky; then it seems to me that the gates

of Paradise must be as beautiful as they and no farther from me.

I thought long, that night outside the Englishman's window. It seemed to me that I would gain nothing by being so foolish as to let the big man shoot me. Even the stamp-machine in the second valley had changed its song. Now it said, "Go-back! Go-back! Go-back!"

So back I went across the hills, walking slowly along the narrow white trail between the dark jungle-walls; back to Santa Ana. That week I married Maria. There was no need to wait, for she had already the house and patch of land which had been her man's. Truly, she was not like Rosa; not in the least like Rosa was she, for she was fat and very sharp of tongue; also, there were the five *niñas* which told of her other man.

But, of a certainty, *señor*, it is far better to have Maria and be beside you here today, than to be dead from that Englishman's bullet; to be—perhaps up there; perhaps in Purgatory! *Sí, señor!* Antonio Ruiz, he is not altogether the imbecile; plantains are not so good as tortillas, but to a hungry man much better than neither!

Ha! There walk horses upon the trail. Without doubt, it is that lazing Miguel, hours behind time, as always.

What is that, *señor?* The scar? Ah, yes! I had almost forgotten.

I told you it had come because once I loved a girl—loved Rosa. That was truth. Maria came upon me suddenly one day, as I sat beside the house dreaming, as sometimes I do, and staring along the trail that leads to the mine of Santa Ana. She said that it was of the fickle Rosa that I dreamed; comparing Rosa's slenderness with her thickness of body. She struck me across the face with the iron tortilla bowl.

A hard woman in her anger is my Maria, *señor*.

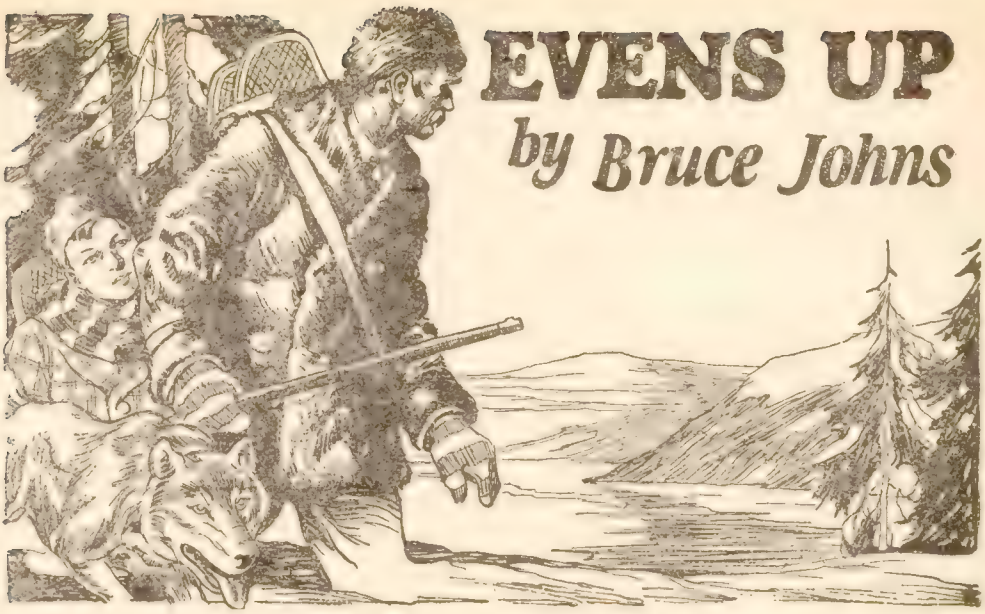
A LANDLOCKED "CAPE HORN"

by Hugh Pendexter

IN THE early fifties there were few miners in the Sacramento Valley and along the rivers flowing in from the east who at least had not heard of "Cape Horn" near Downieville on the North Fork of the Yuba River. Many had seen it, and a considerable number had "rounded" it. The diggings being very extensive around Downieville many miners were busy on each fork for miles above the town. The surrounding mountains being precipitous, the only means of communication were the narrow, winding trails. These crossed and recrossed the river as the forbidding nature of the banks demanded. Because of the difficulty in getting to the town there were no mirrors in the Downieville bar-rooms and gambling places. Everything had to be brought for seventy or more miles over the mountains on the backs of mules. And "Cape Horn" above the town was too much even for a pack-mule. Yet those who used it frequently thought nothing of it, and with a hop and a jump would "round" it while carrying a week's supply of grub on their backs.

"Cape Horn" was a point on a high, almost perpendicular bluff, where the river makes a bend. At this point the trail followed the edge of the bluff some eighty feet above the brawling stream. It was not a path but a series of spots where one might secure a foot-hold and nothing more. A tip of a rock, or a bit of an exposed root. The footing was measured by inches. Only at certain places could two men pass each other, and only then by clinging to each other. Such was the approach to the "Horn" on each side.

But the "Horn" itself was even more precarious to travel. It was where a cleft in a perpendicular rock was bridged by a small pine, five inches in diameter, and it lay two feet outside the rock. To round the Horn the traveler rested one foot on the tree, prayed it wouldn't slip, and with the other secured a toe-hold on any inequalities in the face of the rock towering above him. One must glance down to see where to place a foot on the tree, and in doing so glimpsed the rocks between his straddling legs. Many men are said to have been killed by falling on the rocks at this point.



EVENS UP

by Bruce Johns

Author of "The Fox of St. John's" and "The Man Who Hated Dogs"

THE entire post of Barbee, North Athabasca—three whites, nineteen Indians and fifty-four dogs—knows about it when Pherson Macomber is on the warpath. He is not noisy about it, but his wife, the only white woman within eighty miles, forgets her bad Scotch and takes to her shrill native French. The dogs break away from the sheltered door of the trading-store and slink coward-tailed into the snow.

Every Sikanni, Strongbow and Beaver, and his "Klooch" for that matter too, fears Macomber not because he is the connecting link between them and the great life-sustaining trading-company but because once he has an idea, a prejudice, a hatred, he does not take his teeth out of it until the death.

The only other white man in Barbee is Hidger Lacomp, solemn but blasphemous old heathen with four generations of Tootyah Lake traders behind him. Silent, tenacious and brave settlers of Hudson Bay's earliest post west of the Rockies they had been, and although there had come the inevitable Indian blood, the last of the Lacomps has retained the three characteristics of his kin.

And so it was that Madame Macomber's strident French was heard that early Spring day, high and nervous above the slamming of the door as Macomber stamped out amidst the panicky dogs.

The master of the House of Macomber strode straight up the path to Hidger Lacomp's shack.

He punched open the door.

Lacomp was seated on his cane chair trying a repaired trap on the leg of an overturned stool. He lifted his brushy eyebrows and stared in a startled, childish way. Snake-eye, his great half-breed husky, hunched himself on his rump, his blood-red tongue dripping saliva as he blinked at the glowing stove.

"Ken fr-riendship?" shot out Macomber.

"Aye?" muttered Lacomp through his long black mustache. "Aye, Mac?"

"That baste," roared the trader, pointing to the dog, "you gotta kill't!"

Lacomp dropped his trap and lumbered to his feet.

"Mac," he said reproachfully.

"You and me is only white men here," gritted the store-keeper. "We ken fr-riendship, you and me, we do, now twenty year."

"Aye," said Lacomp soothingly. "Good frien'."

"Then you shoot that derg!"

Lacomp blinked solemnly and shook his

black head as if throwing his thoughts into place. He made no answer.

"I tell ye, mon," roared Macomber. "Las' Soomer I hae a turkey brung clear fra Edmonton here fur my Donal's welcome hame fra the 'cad'my today. I kept him through all the Winter and noo when the lad is breakin' in the last miles to here that baste turnt killer and got that bir-rd!"

"I seen blood on his jowl," said the trapper complacently.

Macomber threw out his arm in a menacing gesture.

"Ye'll kill him!" he said steadily.

"Naw!" said Lacomp. "Why? He's good derg, thata fella. Fights a cougar any time. He jus' thata kind."

Macomber advanced from the door to the center of the room.

"Wull ye?"

"Naw!" suddenly roared Lacomp into Macomber's face. "He's my derg, thata fella! You don't own no derg a mine, *Mr.* Macomber!"

Macomber stood vibrating a minute and then turned abruptly back to the threshold. There he turned, one foot over the sill.

"I'm gane atter my gun, *Mr.* Lacomp!"

"You come traipsen with thata gun," rasped the trapper, "an' you'll no never leave!"

Flecks of foam had suddenly appeared on his lips. He lowered his great head and spread his legs. His open hands played before him as a wrestler watches for an opening.

They stood there silent, watching each other. A sharp growl broke the menacing silence. Lacomp glanced down to see Snake-eye nervously hitching himself like a cat toward the door.

"—— cur!" snarled the store-keeper. "Spring me, aye?" He caught up a stool as he leaped back into the room.

"I'll club his brain!"

A cane chair hurtled through the air and caught the dog on the flank. Snake-eye whirled his snarling mouth toward the new enemy, discovered it was his master—and slunk out the door.

"I kin train my own derg!" yelled Lacomp.

"Ye've already trained him a killer!"

Macomber flung his stool into a corner.

Lacomp spoke the unforgivable phrase. They roared together.

The hard strength of his opponent came home to each man as they clung tight, swayed about the room, hugging and pummeling each other.

Snake-eye had thrust a curious snout over the high door-sill. He snarled when Macomber rushed the trapper to the wall and banged his head against the corner of a shelf.

Lacomp braced himself against the wall, brought up his knee to the stomach of his opponent and kicked himself out of the embrace. Macomber went back suddenly, struck a stool and crashed to his back on the floor. As he fell he gripped the trapper's boot and Lacomp went down with him.

They rolled on the floor, snarling, biting, clawing. Then Macomber was astride Lacomp and raining blows upon his upturned face.

Snake-eye broke into a piercing howl. His blue-black lips contracted from yellow fangs. Macomber continued to club at the head. With a lunge the dog was over the sill. Forty pounds of infuritated sinew and muscle struck Macomber square on the back. He sprawled off the body and battled to save his throat.

Lacomp, with blood leaking from the corner of his mouth, sagged on his hands and knees and cried hoarsely to his dog.

"Ho! Snake! Ho! Down, derg!"

He staggered to his feet and hurled his great body upon that of the berserk animal. His hard fingers sank into the dog's throat muscles. Snake-eye snarled, but gave way to the strangling hold. After a time he crawled from under his master, slunk away to the door and out.

Macomber sat on the floor, his shirt open at the shoulder, blood soaking through the frayed rip. He made no move to attack Lacomp who lay prone and exhausted from that last vicious effort that had taken every ounce of strength.

Macomber regained his feet first and lurched to the door.

"*Mr.* Lacomp," he muttered as he clung to the rough jamb, "it is vera weel ken indeed that yer derg is a killer. I'm sorra I ha'e oney store in Barbee. I trust ye've grub for rest of Winter or yer feet are brawn enough to make Marentville and back whene'er ye need it."

Lacomp sat up.

"Aye," he said, closing his mouth like a trap, "I got grub a two months yet. But them feet, they're al'ays able, them feet, to keep 'way a them what doan't want 'em!"

EDMONTON had been life to Donald Macomber until he was a sizable lad. There is occasional gay life in Edmonton, and Madame Macomber was French. In the city where the Hudson's Bay Company's establishment is a huge department store, and mile upon mile of paved streets have covered the trails on which wild Crees and Blackfeet once waylaid and scalped each other, Madame Macomber forgot the tiny post and its hardships and danced till the stern command of her husband stopped the music.

That Donald and his mother were living in a world of some frivolity had not been fully comprehended by the store-keeper until he made a journey one day to the big city to consult with the officials of the company.

There had been a short but emphatic scene and Donald went to the academy and Madame Macomber accompanied her husband to the post. Since then the boy had been home for his vacations. No bairn of Macomber was to be a sissy. So when the trail was first opened in Spring the principal of the school was always asked to give the boy the vacation he had been unable to take at the Christmas period.

"I want that bairn a mine to be naebody's fule," Macomber had told Lacomp the first time the lad had come home. "I don't know naebody what kin mak' a mon outa him as ye, Lacomp."

Lacomp had undertaken the commission with a will. He had never married and the boy filled a want in his heart that he did not know existed until they sat around the iron stove at night. The boy soon had two fathers; the two men one son. To Donald it was the love of the pine and fir, of rushing, mad rivers and the uncanny, unseen but premonitory dangers of the black forests in the Lesser Slave Lake country that had trapped his father twenty-five years before which made him yearn each year for the trail's opening. But for all this, the son of Pherson Macomber remained the greenest youngster that ever came over the Gold-wash trail in the care of three Sikanni guides. He was now twelve.

Lacomp had worked with the boy four seasons without much result. He had shown him how to set a trap and Donald had sprung it so tightly that it had snapped a foot off a rabbit; he had shown him natural signs to guide the eye on the return trip, and Lacomp had wasted much ammunition in signaling to a lost boy. When the teacher cleaned the boy's Remington .32 rim-fire rifle, he was very likely to come upon him later in the day digging a trap-peg hole with the gun's nose. Lacomp had shown him how to pack his shoulder-bag so the weight was borne evenly by the shoulders—and Lacomp had been forced to carry two packs at the end of the first three miles.

Lacomp was thinking of these things again as he leaned against the jamb of his door and looked down at the little trading-store. There were lights in every window, and now and then the door swung open as an Indian stepped in to the crowded bar. The son of the House of Macomber was coming home.

Lacomp leaned heavily against the shack, and the smoke curled lazily from under his long, black mustache. Snake-eye was restless in his sleep beside the iron stove inside.

A long-drawn call from the trail brought Lacomp up keenly. He saw the door flung open and Macomber and his wife rush into the snow, followed by every Indian in Barbee. Macomber shouted. He was answered from the trail. Four figures came into the light of the doorway. One of them—the boy—rushed into his mother's arms.

The dogs barked excitedly. The figures by the door moved gaily in the patch of light, milled about the boy and then crushed after him through the door. Then the door slammed and only the lighted windows sent squares of light across the snow. A dog

fight started at the door and snarled itself away into the pines.

Lacomp took his pipe from his mouth, knocked out the ashes in a spray of sparks and went inside and awakened his dog.

LACOMP sat beside the fire busy with his interminable trap repairing. Now and then he turned his eyes to the door. Once he stopped and went to the window and looked down through the darkness to the store. He sighed and went back to the door.

The growl of Snake-eye aroused him a few minutes later.

Lacomp, still sitting in his chair, bawled—

"C'min!"

Donald stepped over the sill. Snake-eye slunk forward for scent inspection, took the boy's pat on his head indifferently and retired to the fire. He yawned largely and went to sleep. Donald and Lacomp looked at each other silently.

"You bin home two day now," said Lacomp at last.

"I'd have been to see you sooner, Hidger, but pop told me not to come."

"Why did you come then?"

"Oh, gee; you don't expect me to sit down there all the time, do you? Ain't nothing to do there but sit. I thought maybe you and me could set some traps and have some fun like we usta."

"Your father told you to keep 'way a me, boy. I ain't takin' you on no trails mebbe, I betcha."

"Aw, Hidger. Gee! I ain't had no fun. I been thinking every minute I been away that you and me would set traps and things. Then you and pop got to get mad."

Lacomp attempted to change the subject.

"Bin a —— bad Winter," he said. "Small an'mals got hit —— bad by them meat-eatin' fellas and them cougars are prowling 'roun' in open 'cause their bellies make 'em. Ain't no fun on trail right now."

"Aw, I ain't afraid. Didn't we do it last year?"

The trapper nodded.

"Awful bad Winter for an'mal food," he repeated.

"I'll bet you're mad at me, too."

The boy was coming closer and closer to the seated trapper. Lacomp stiffened.

"Naw," he said firmly. "I don't go fer to have no doin's with yer paw!"

"But I *ain't* my paw!" wheedled the boy. "You like me, don't you, Hidger?"

A sudden flush ran up the trapper's frost-bitten cheek bones.

"Sure, kid. Sure I like you."

"Well, then you don't want me to have a bum time, do you? Aw, come on! Just once or twice. Huh?"

Lacomp listened and was lost.

"We see," he said. "Mebbe now and then."

"All right; it's a promise! Now I got to go so they won't know I been here. I'll just wander off for a walk down the trail with a lunch and meet you. We'll fix it right away."

He rose and ran to the door and out.

Lacomp went to the window and watched until the boy slunk into the store. He smiled fondly now at the lighted windows below.

ATHABASCA is a district of the Northwest Territories and some day will be a province. Its surface is made up of wooded plains broken by low mountain ranges. The occasional Winter chinook is one of its freaks.

When the chinook sweeps in in Winter with its dry, warm air, "all of Athabasca becomes a raging river with a million tributaries." Every coulée is a dangerous glacier, every hillside an imminent avalanche, every trail a challenge to fate.

And when the wind dies, the renewed freeze snaps the rushing waters back to solidity, and it is safest to hug the cabin's little iron stove while the snapping is in process. There is wildness abroad; every animal shows teeth over the lip.

Although Lacomp had met and won in many a battle with the chinook in early Spring, he had never learned to scorn it. Seldom was there a warning, and so when the chinook came softly one afternoon it caught Lacomp and the boy when they had set traps across the frozen Gold Dust River, eight miles from Barbee.

They turned and fled toward the river, the dog racing ahead. It was their hope that the Gold Dust, already pounded soft by the Spring weather and rushing underwaters, would hold for another hour.

"Stay clost, you Donal'! Them wind breakin' fas', boy! You watch them pin feet a yourn!"

They sloshed on in the sudden muck, snowshoes dangling at their backs.

At Mule Bone Creek they met the first broken ice. They stopped.

"Lis'en to me, Donal'," announced the trapper. "Thisa one goin' to be —— bad trek, boy. Doan't think mebbe make Barbee; you and me doan't."

"But, Hidger; what will my mother say?"

"I didn't ast yer on no trip!" said Lacomp sullenly.

"I'm not afraid, Hidger," murmured the boy in a startled way.

They pushed on, and at last they heard the Gold Dust River. Between the steep banks ran a torrent of broken ice and water.

The boy sat down and began to cry.

"Shut up them slops!" cried Lacomp. "Thata ford we crossed thisa mornin' ain't no crossin'-place now—and yer slops ain't goin' to get us 'crost neither. We doan't git acrost this spill til' morrow mornin'. Not then 'less wind go dead."

"We'll maybe freeze to death."

"It ain't no freezin' I'm 'fraid a, boy. I bin watchin' all day a big somethin' on the ridge up there. Looks like —— hungry cougar to me. Yer know how many skins we couched in ten day—two. Well, that means no food anywheres for wolf and cougar."

"But they won't jump people," questioned the boy.

"School-books is all wrong," grunted the trapper. "Mebbe some day yer bring school-book writin' feller here for bad Winter and let him talk to cougar 'bout it. Now git up and git outa here!"

He turned abruptly from the moving ice, and the boy struggled to his feet and trotted after him.

"Wait for me, Hidger, please!"

"We mus' keep goin', boy; all night mebbe. Mus' keep warm. Nothin' dry fer fire now. Here, you Snake-eye; belly by leg!"

Night had begun to fall. The boy took his place by the man's side or rear as the trail gave space, his rifle gripped tightly in his mittened fingers, his eyes watching the ledges and the trees and making every shadow into a beast.

The dog began to tread daintily as if on thin ice.

"Think we could get under a ledge and find wood, Hidger?"

The trapper caught the tremble in the boy's voice.

"I ain't goin' to have no belly achin'——"

He turned and watched the boy slump down to his hands and knees.

"Well," said Lacomp as if he had been waiting for this action. "Yer done out a'ready."

"Aw, I'm tired, Hidger."

Lacomp stood there cursing softly in his big mustache.

"Donal'," he said gruffly, "when yer gets tired, yer gets —— cold and then yer jus' freezes up and dies. Yer think mebbe yer sleepy. Huh! Thata cold make yer comfor'able—when yer agoin' to slump out."

"But I just can't go on. I'm not cold; just awful tired."

"Aye, warm and kinda sleepy."

Lacomp looked about him.

"They's a few rocks up there. Mebbe little dry wood; mebbe not. We stay there. But yer gotta keep movin' all night, boy!"

He dragged the boy to his feet and they struggled up the rocks and to the ledge.

Night closed in solid and with promise of a weak moon to come after many hours as they scrambled under the rocks. There was no wood.

They sat there gathering their breaths, the dog whimpering against the mackinaw of his master and nosing his mittened hand.

"Belly down, you Snake-eye," said Lacomp. "Thata an'mal yer ain't 'fraid a none."

Suddenly the dog arose, his mane bristling, his lip curling over his teeth, a snarl in his throat.

"Belly down, derg. Thata female, boy," muttered Lacomp, and he brought his rifle under his fingered mitten.

There was a long silence. Lacomp suddenly turned to the boy and found him asleep. He leaped to his feet, grasped the boy in both hands and shook him awake. Donald opened bleared eyes and tried to speak.

"Oh, le' me 'lone," he groaned.

Lacomp shook him again.

"Ho! Donal'! Ho! —— it, boy, pull outa that!"

He dragged the boy up.

"Yer feet! Git on 'em! Stan'! Stan' up! Work 'em! Kick 'em! Kick 'em!"

The boy obeyed, his brain sodden with the treacherous sleep. At last he stood resting his shoulder against the rock.

"I'm a'right," he murmured. "I won't sleep again, Hidger."

"Woan't give yer no chanct!"

Snake-eye crouched under the ledge, his eyes sparkling like skimmed mercury, his throat rumbling defiance to the enemy he sensed.

Lacomp took the boy's arm again.

"Now move 'bout. Walk clost under ledge. Beat that a sleep, Donal'!"

With his hands guiding on the rock wall, the boy stepped forward. They moved along together. The dog looked mutely on as he half raised his taut body.

A trickle of snow sifted upon Lacomp's shoulder from above.

"Back!"

He flung the boy and himself under the ledge. The dog snarled.

"I seen her," whispered the trapper. "By ——, boy, that a narrow one. That a she-cat's eye I seen on the rock above, fidgeting its paws for jump at us, I bet. Spilled snow that a way!"

He was breathing heavily.

"She wants the derg," he added.

Donald shifted his body against the warm coat of Snake-eye and sighed.

"If yer sleep, boy," threatened Lacomp, "I'll bust yer head open!"

There was no answer from the boy.

"Donal'!"

No answer.

"Donal'! —— yer! Git outa it!"

The only answer was the movement of the boy's limp arm lifting slowly and dropping across the dog's back and a long, heavy sigh.

"They ain't no room under for to walk, but yer gotta. Yer dead in ten minute if yer doan't. Git up!"

He pulled Donald away from the dog.

"Awful col'," said Donald in a far away voice.

"Stan' up, Donal', boy! Stan' up! Doan't die! I'm goin' out and take one shot at thata lady's eye above—if I get first shot mebbe."

The boy pushed himself to his hands and knees and then to his feet.

"Don't go out there, Hidger," he muttered. "That thing'll jump you—and then I'm here."

He threw himself weakly against the trapper and hung there.

"Don't go! Don't go!"

"A'right. A'right. I'll shoot the gun a couple a times to drive him 'way."

But the boy's grip had slipped and without warning he slumped down to Lacomp's feet.

"Yer gotta keep goin', cougar or no. Yer sicker'n I thought!"

He lifted the boy and held him upright against the wall.

"Kick them feet!"

The boy began to tread like a tired soldier at mark time.

"Now yer keep goin'. I'll throw a shot or two."

Lacomp took his hand from the boy's shoulder and reached down for his gun.

"Don't go!"

Donald, as the restraining hand left him, flung out his arms, took a step forward and plunged headlong into the snow.

A great black cat made a curving, eager plunge.

Lacomp yelled a curse as he frantically sought his gun.

And at the yell the dog dived his great body forward to battle.

The cat turned from the unconscious boy to meet the charge of the dog. Wit, strategy, cunning—all were useless as the dog and the cougar rolled, bloody, open-jawed and with slashing paws to the bottom of the coulée.

Snake-eye, the trained killer, was in death-grips with a natural killer. It was a matter of a lucky slash of fang or claw.

Lacomp found his gun. He rushed down, smashing his way through loosened snow and ice recklessly. He found them there, a great bundle of fur, clinched and silent except for the snarling of the heated wind in their nostrils. The dog was underneath.

Lacomp knelt two gun lengths away and brought his rifle upon the bundle of fur. Then he shouted.

The yellow eyes of a cat peered suddenly at the human cry—and the rifle spoke once.

WHEN the moon came up yellow and weak over Gold Dust Ridge, Hidger Lacomp had been watching his dog lying quietly in the snow beside the dead puma for two hours. Twice he had run his gnarled hands over the animal's body and found pain in two places, the belly and the chest. Much blood.

On the ridge above the figure of the boy passed relentlessly to and fro, shocked into full comprehension by the tragedy. A steady stamping of feet came muffled through the stillness.

Now the moon disclosed the dog with his long muzzle tucked under his chest like some grotesque bird. The light disclosed too what Lacomp had felt in his two examinations, a trembling of the whole body.

Lacomp sighed deeply through his long black mustache, raised his carbine, and, as the report died away, he saw a tiny red hole behind the beloved Snake-eye's ear.

THEY met Macomber's Sikanni searching-party at the edge of Barbee after the chinook had died as suddenly as it came. Donald rushed to his father and stood there holding to him.

"Wull?"

The boy began to weep.

"An' wi' Muster Lacomp!" said Macomber in a helpless tone.

Donald began to stammer the night's story.

Lacomp stood aside, sullen, listening to the boy's whimpering in open disgust.

When it ended he turned away abruptly and started toward the hill and his shack.

"Lacomp!"

Macomber came racing toward him.

"You're in a dashed hurry, Lacomp."

The trapper said nothing. They did not look at each other.

"That derg—is—dead?"

"Aye."

There was an awkward silence.

"He jumped in at the baste beside the boy?"

"Aye."

Macomber swung his great hands idly and refused to meet Lacomp's eyes.

"Ye'll nae be hurryin' awa?"

"I have grub to get at Marentville," said Lacomp evenly. "My feet are—are brawn."

"Nay," said Macomber. "Nay! Wull ye—wull ye no hae a wee drap o' the whusky wi' me?"

Their eyes met evenly for just a moment. Lacomp nodded.

They turned and clumped down the trail.

Slants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

The Unnamed Book

BETWEEN you and me I'm not a big reader. I avoid books—just as I avoid talkative people. Though we know that there are both who are well worth attention. The trouble is that there are so many of the other sort. I'll tell you a thing that always annoys me. People have a way of coming along saying:

"Oh, have you read so and so? You must read so and so. It's one of the classics."

That sort of things makes me say—

"To —— with the classics."

There is a certain living author whose works have been recommended to me by well-meaning people until his very name is an abomination, almost.

Why can not people leave a man to browse along the pasture in his own manner? I refuse to be made to read a book by anybody, no matter who its author. Look at the Bible itself? I had that book crammed into me, rubbed into me, when I was young until today I can hardly look at it. That seems awful, of course. But what will you? I am human, am I not? And free? I refuse to be jailed, or driven, or in any manner coerced. My religion is my own. My ideas are my own. My life is my own. I am master of my soul.

One writes to me saying—

"You must read more."

I reply:

"Read? What for all this reading? Books are supposed to be about life are they not? Then why not live?"

I add:

"You have read, and read, and read. Look at your ideas! You could not bring forth an original idea, think an original thought, dream even an original thought, to save ten worlds from flamed destruction. Your whole mind is simply a conglomeration of the thoughts of others. *You* have ceased to exist."

Why do most people write?

Is it that in them there is a bursting music which they can not control? No. Mostly it is for one of these: Fame, advertisement, the delight of seeing their names and idiot ideas in print upon the book-stalls, or, worse yet, for money. With many it is a sort of scab that they keep scratching at. Now I'm going to quit and read a good book. You'd like to know the book's name? I'll not tell you.

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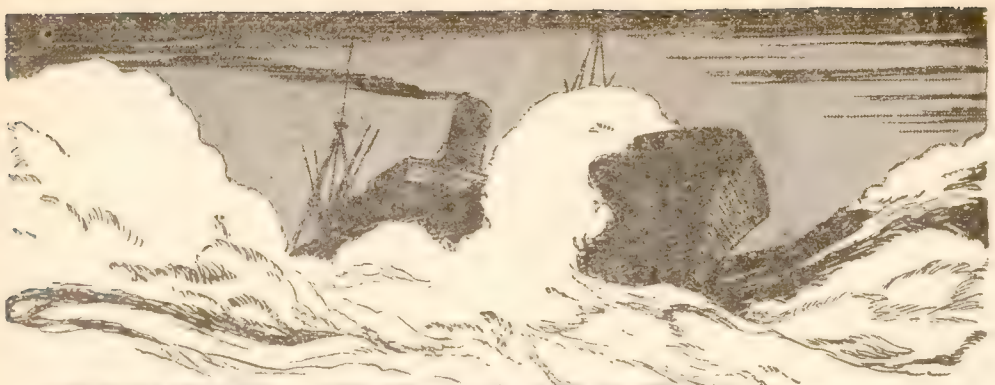


THE TRAMP

A THREE-PART STORY PART II

by W. Townend

Author of "The Trimmer," "Angel," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

JIMMY KERRILL, the second mate of the *Medea*, was Irish, with all of an Irishman's virtues and a few of his failings. So nothing was more natural than that he should pick a quarrel with a dapper, conceited little man because the latter had insulted a woman. Then he went on his way to keep an appointment with Eileen Mavison.

He was surprized to find the man he had quarreled with was Grinton, Eileen's stepfather, who ordered Kerrill out of the house, warning him that his present voyage on the *Medea*—owned by Grinton—would be the last.

Grinton, badly pressed for money, persuaded Captain "Black John" Dorrock to scuttle the *Medea*—Dorrock consenting only because he needed money for his sick wife's sake—although Grinton would advance him none.

While Dorrock was discussing ways and means with his chief engineer, Lappett, the first mate, entered and tried to get the captain to smuggle dope.

"I wouldn't touch the stuff," Black John said slowly. "Not with a barge-pole," and kicked Lappett out of his house.

Lappett suspected that something crooked was afoot, and he wanted to have a finger in the pie.

On sailing-day Eileen came down to say good-by to Jimmy and reminded him of their childhood friendship. Grinton also came to the ship to have a last word with the captain, and asked Black John to put Kerrill out of the way.

Just before sailing-time the last of the crew tumbled aboard—all drunk—and among them was a red-headed man. He was practically unconscious. As soon as he came to his senses he demanded that they put him ashore. He had been shanghaied, he said.

The *Medea* was not many days out at sea when Jimmy Kerrill called down the red-headed man, Hannigan, for bullying one of the crew. The two men came to blows.

Later Hannigan confided in Lappett that there was some one on the ship he was after.

"He'll be sorry he didn't see the last of me years ago—same as he hoped," said Hannigan.

Lappett, sensing that the man might be able to help him in the dope-smuggling scheme, decided to foster his friendship.

In a dense fog Black John by excellent seamanship narrowly averted a collision with two other ships.

"Near thing that," said Lappett with a quick look at Black John's face.

LATER the second mate tapped at the door of the chief engineer's room and entered.

"Here you are, chief," he said. "Look at it!" He held out the chit with the position marked. "Don't ever let me hear you say again that we went and lost you! See! Navigation, that, chief, isn't it!"

"E-eh!" The chief studied the slip of paper that Jimmy had given him. "Weel, I'm surprized. Jimmy, I was bettin' the second engineer only yesterday that you navigators wud miss Nova Scotia a'taegither an' pile the auld hooker atop o' Cape Cod or, mebbe, Bermuda. Aye, Bermuda's mair like, I thocht. But I was no' takin'

Sparks intae accoont! I'm no' inquisitive, but I ha'e reason to believe that ye had yer bearin's gi'en you by wireless. Well, let's hope ye've mad' no mistak' in worrkin' yer position oot on the charrt!"

"Thank you, chief, for those few kind words. Mr. Lappett, who is looking in his usual excellent health, though spotty in places, will be delighted when I tell him. I don't like to talk too much, chief, but I've reason to believe, using your own expression, that our best beloved Lappett was giving Captain Dorrock advice what he should do in a fog, and so on!"

"Aye, is that a fac'? An' the auld man tuk the advice, I've nae doot!"

"Facts bein' important, chief, he didn't. If he had, from what he said in the heat of the moment, I judge that you and I would have been swimming side by side at this precise minute, chatting about the temperature of the water off the coast of Canada and wondering whether we should have been wiser to have put on our heavy Winter underwear before starting!"

The chief nodded.

"Frae what I had the pleasure o' seein' wi' ma ain unaided vision a while back, Jimmy, an' hearin' wi' ma ain unaided ears, it's a miracle in mair senses nor yin that thon fella wi' the black funnel didna hit us! A-weel, we live an' learn!"

"Well, chief, what I say is, and always have said, so long as the deck and engineer officers have that deep respect for each other, that we er-know they do have, well, who cares if we sink or swim!"

"Aye, who cares!" said the chief. "An', noo, awa wi' you, laddie, an' bile yer heid!"

"Chief!" said Jimmy, seizing his hand. "I will. God bless you! You've given me hope!"

BLACK JOHN was still in the chart-room, poring over the chart, when the chief engineer asked if he might speak to him.

"Come in, Mac! Come in!"

"Ha'e ye had yer dinner?"

"Not yet. What's bitin' yer now, Mac?"

MacGish closed the door after him and then dropped on to the settee and took the pipe out of his mouth and laughed silently.

"As I was sayin' to thon second mate a while back, we live an' learn!"

"Glad you find somethin' funny to laugh at these days," said Dorrock. "Cough it up, whatever it is!"

"John, I was ha'in' a breith o' fresh air on deck, leanin' ower the rail amidships when thon black-funneled cow missed us! A near thing that, cap'n! A vera near thing!"

"Aye," said Dorrock. "A near thing. Another coat of paint, Mac, or another two yards on our nose, an' they'd have got us!"

"I heard ye shoot, 'Hard a port!' an' I seen the ither fella scrapin' oor rail an' I ran below, wunnerin' at the ways o' humanity! A-weel, ye ken yer ain business best, I've nae doot, but, man, ye missed a chance! Aye, ye missed a chance!"

Neither spoke until the echoes of the whistle had died away.

"How d'you mean, missed a chance?" said Black John uneasily.

"I mean what I say. John, it's a peety ye cudna ha'e taken the risk! Wi' luck ye micht ha'e managed it!" Though door and ports were shut he bent forward toward the table and dropped his voice to a whisper. "Fur a man wha's gaun to ha'e an accident wi' his ship, ye're fleein' in the face of the A'michty! A strange ship comes straicht at ye in a fog, an' ye dinna accept what the Fates ha'e brocht ye! Man, ye had a chance, then, o' lettin' the auld *Medea* gang doon wi'oot ony trouble or bother—an accident, beyond a' doot! I'm beginnin' to think ye're no' muckle in earnest. If ye'd let the ither fella hit us, wi' luck we'd ha'e been sunk."

Dorrock searched the chief's face, but there was no sign of a smile, no suggestion that he was laughing.

"But, Mac—" he tapped with his dividers on the table and frowned—"but, Mac, how d'you know we'd have sunk?"

"Ye micht ha'e left that to me, John! I'd ha'e ta'en —— guid care we wudna ha'e been afloat hauf an hoor efter we'd been struck! See!"

"But, suppose the other ship had sunk! What then?"

MacGish smiled.

"Thon fella was heavier nor us an' gaun four-five knots faster o' the twa, he'd ha'e rippit the plates oot us—a glancin' blaw abaft the focs'le—if ye hadna been sae hasty wi' yer—'hard a port!' "

"But—" again the dividers tapped the table. Black John frowned— "But, Mac, eight bells or no, there was bound to be

some o' the hands in the focs'le! Suppose they'd been drowned!"

"Aye, there's aye the risk, e'en when the times comes fur us to dae what we've been plannin'! There's aye the chance some puir fella wull gang oot his way to git droon'd! Weel, ye maun tak' the risk!"

"It's —— ain't it?" sighed Black John. "—— nothin' else! Mac, why the —— do we come to sea? Why the —— do we get tied up with a man like Grinton?"

And then the chief engineer's eyes twinkled and he broke into a laugh.

"Man, confess! Tell me; wasna it secon' nature to save yer ship? It was. I ken fine what ye was thinkin', John. Whate'er ye've promised auld smug-face back in Cardiff it wasna in ye to stand by an' let ony ither ship in the wurrl' smash into ye! E'en if he wud ha'e sunk ye! An', John, pittin' aside the risk o' losin' somebody's life, which by the sam' token there's five, six, aboard this —— hooker we cud weel spare, I'm no' blamin' ye. There's yer professional reputation that ye had to think o', eh?"

Dorrock whistled.

"Dunno about that, Mac! When I saw that other feller blindin' up out of the fog, it never entered my head to do anythin' else than dodge a collision. See! An' it's just as well, Mac, that I haven't a brain like yours. Because, Mac, even if I'd been fool enough to get the *Medea* sunk an' lucky enough to lose no lives, Grinton wouldn't have parted with a brass farthing. Not him. No, Mac, he'd have said the collision was an accident an' that it was no work of ours we sank! See!"

MacGish gave a grunt.

"As bad as that, eh?"

"We'll need to hold a gun at his head to get what he promised to hand over, anyway. But he'll find he's makin' a mistake if he thinks he can play fast an' loose! I'm doin' his dirty work, Mac, because I'm in need of the money. If I wasn't—" he snapped his fingers—"he could whistle!"

He yawned.

"Lord! I'm near dead with sleep! It's two nights now since I put my head on the pillow."

He went to a locker and took out a bottle and glasses.

"Dry, Mac?"

"What a question to esk! Did ye e'er ken a MacGish wha wud refuse a wee drappie o' Scotch because he was no' dry!"

"Here's luck, chief!"

"Luck!" said MacGish, nodding over his glass.

They drank solemnly.

"Coal's lasted well!" said Black John. "Another miracle!"

"Aye, wunnerfu'! But I'll no' be sorry when we're tied up alangside in Halifax, bunkerin'! I thocht last week fur sure that we'd be rinnin' short!"

"Dunno about bein' alongside, Mac! We'll be —— lucky if we're not anchored somewhere in Cumberland Basin. Hope Grinton's got our orders for us!"

"Did he gi'e ye ony hint whaur it wud be?"

"Not a word! St. John, New Brunswick, prob'ly. That's my guess. Another drink, Mac?"

"Thenk ye!" said MacGish.

He considered a while, and then—

"Here's profits!"

"Here's profits!"

"I hear that oor frien' Lappett was gi'in ye guid advice this forenoon, John!"

"He was," said Black John.

MacGish rose to his feet.

"A guid lad, thon secon' mate o' yours, John!"

"Well, I'm findin' him so. But there's others, Mac, as don't think so!"

"Meanin' the fella wha'll no' be singin' in the heavenly choir when he gangs, John?"

"Aye, Grinton. He's got it in for Kerrill! But why! Lord knows!"

"Aye, an' sae dae I. I ken fine what fur auld puddick chops disna like him. He's afeart thon lassie o' his, Eileen Mavison, is gettin' ower fond o' him. Didna ye see them talkin' taegither the day we sailed? Grinton was mad ower it! It seems Jimmy Kerrill an' the lass were frien's year syne, when they were bairns, an' they met unexpectit in Cardiff! See! Grinton's afeart o' losin' his clutch at the lass's siller. He's trustee an' guardian an' I dinna ken hoo muckle mair till she's twenty yin!"

Black John nodded.

"He'll have her money all right, Mac! Think he'd let that girl get away with it! He's no fool!"

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in!"

Jimmy Kerrill entered.

"Fog's lifting, sir."

THE *Medea* was twenty miles off Halifax when a blizzard came tearing down out of the northeast. What had happened earlier in the voyage happened again now. The *Medea*, a steamer of seven thousand five hundred tons deadweight, having not more than two thousand tons of water in her ballast tanks, refused to face the wind that blew with hurricane force. All attempts to keep her hove-to head on failed. Consequently, there remained no other course than to turn and run before the gale. It was in the afternoon three days later that the *Medea* crawled into Halifax Harbor for orders, bunker coal and minor repairs to steam-pipes and deck-fittings.

VII

THE sun was setting in a blaze of crimson; the evening was gray and still and very cold; already on the Dartmouth shore lights were shining.

A tug-boat towing a three-masted schooner went fussing by, headed for the open sea.

Black John stood at the door of his room on the lower bridge and yawned. He had had his orders—New York, to load for Cardiff. He had glanced quickly through the bundle of letters the agent's clerk had brought aboard for him. Three were from Maggie. She wrote that she was feeling, if not better, no worse. She prayed night and day that her dear husband would return to her, safe and sound. Maggie would, thought Black John with a little smile, she would.

The day's work was over. Tomorrow they would bunker. He was tired and sleepy. And yet there were certain matters which needed his attention before he could even think of sleep. The mate, for instance. Decidedly, he must see the mate, for the mate's own good.

He went to the top of the ladder that led to the bridge-deck.

Hannigan, the red-haired deck-hand, came slowly from the direction of the forward deck and halted to gaze shoreward.

Black John snorted.

"Here, you!" he said curtly.

Hannigan turned.

"Sir."

Though there was no actual disrespect that one could lay hold of, his tone was abrupt.

Black John stared down at the square, tanned face, with the close-set eyes, and the broken nose with the broad nostrils, and the hard mouth and cleft chin, and he wondered where he had seen a face so ill-favored and forbidding as this. For he knew that once upon a time, somewhere, he had had dealings with a man who resembled this man.

He groped far back in the recesses of memory, and all that he gathered, his one uppermost impression, was that the man he had known long ago, the man who looked like this man Hannigan, was a man he had hated; the associations were unpleasant; he could find no facts, nothing he could actually bring definitely to mind; but that the man who resembled Hannigan was dangerous he was positive.

"You," he said, "what do you want?"

"Me, sir, nothin'!"

"Then, get for'ard!"

"I was goin' to the galley, sir."

Even the man's voice was familiar.

And then, as he frowned down at the sullen face of the deck-hand, waiting below, it came over him with swift and sure conviction that it was Hannigan himself whom he had known years before.

"If you're goin' to the galley, go! Don't keep hangin' around here."

Hannigan slouched aft.

The steward, in his white jacket, appeared from the door that led to the saloon, beneath the lower bridge.

Black John called to him.

"Flotter, go an' tell Mr. Lappett I want to speak to him at once."

He was seated at his table when the mate arrived.

"You wanted to speak to me, sir!"

"Yes, mister, I do. Badly. Close the door, please. It wouldn't do any good, if any one heard."

An angry gleam flickered in the little pale eyes and under the yellow skin, drawn tight over the prominent cheek-bones, there showed a touch of color, as Lappett turned to do as Black John asked him.

"Well, sir," he said, "what is it?"

Black John studied him for a moment without speaking. The mate's teeth bit into his lower lip. He frowned and moved restlessly and his fingers played with a button on his waistcoat.

"Mr. Lappett," said Black John, getting up from his seat, "I'm not satisfied."

"Oh!" said the mate in his flat voice. "Oh, ain't yer? Not satisfied with me, or what?"

"Not satisfied with you, mister."

The mate cleared his throat.

"You'll 'ave to go into details. All very well, makin' accusations, but I want more than that!"

"You'll have it. I don't go about this ship askin' questions or spyin', mister, but in the course of the voyage, I've seen an' heard more than enough to prove I'm right. See, mister! Don't you make any mistake, I'm right. I don't like you, nor your methods. You've no control, no discipline. If I left things to you, same as I ought, we'd be no more than a floatin' pig-sty. I'm warnin' you now, Mr. Lappett, that I'm goin' to recommend the marine superintendent to get rid of you at the end of the voyage. You won't sail with me again, whatever happens."

"If it's a case of not sailin' with you, Captain Dorrock, mebbe you're right. The odds are it won't be me that the superintendent gets rid of!"

"Now you're talkin'!" said Dorrock.

"Yes, I'm talkin'. Mebbe I'll be workin', when you're on the beach, out of a job."

"First place," said Black John sharply, "I'll trouble you to say 'sir,' when you're speakin' to me; secondly, you're welcome to any —— opinion you may have. I'm not int'rested. I'm dealin' with facts. What I'm doin' now, mister, is warnin' you to look out. Now, you listen to me, Lappett, an' don't you start yappin' till I'm through. I'm not a fool. Mebbe you imagined I was. I'm not. I've not been handlin' deck-hands an' scum like you for the last twenty-five years without learnin' to look underneath a man's skin. See! I know what you are. No good.

"I'm goin' to pass up that business of how to navigate in a fog without argument; only, that any master fool enough to take the advice of a mate like you deserves what's comin'! But, apart from that, for a year now you've been tryin' to get me in wrong, tryin' to lose me my job. That's somethin' we don't need to discuss. It's true. You've been tryin' to fill me with booze, to begin with. That's somethin' we'll take as proved, too. I've drunk a ——uva lot of bad liquor because o' you, Lappett, but it's done me no harm. An' you no good. You'd trap me, would you! Get me drunk an' let them tie a tin can to me! Lord, man, if you get me drunk aboard ship you're welcome to take my job any day. An', as for that, I'm a —— sight more sensible drunk than you are, sober. See! But I won't forget what you've tried to do!"

"Talk!" he said. "All talk. Nothin' but talk, sir. I'm not goin' to waste my breath, denyin' or affirmin', sir. But what you say don't count; not with me—sir!"

"No," said Dorrock. "It don't. Naturally. But, listen, this will. You told me last night we were home. ——! I got the taste of that brandy in my gullet still. You told me you were plannin' to pick up some cocaine here in Halifax an' smuggle it home. See! You suggested—you actually had the gall to suggest—that I'd go into the scheme with you! Now, let me tell you, mister, an' I'm a man of my word, if I find you with opium or cocaine or any such muck in your possession, while you're mate aboard this ship, I'll hand you over to the police. See! You act ugly with me, Mr. Lappett, I'll act ugly with you! See! It's skunks like you that keep —— filled. I know what cocaine does, if you don't. I'll warn the customs on the other side, if I've reason to think you've got any of the stuff with you. What's more, I'll know —— well if you have. I've got methods, mister, of findin' out. An' if I learn, after what I'm tellin' you now, that you've disobeyed me, an' you've got some of the dope aboard ship, then, by ——! I'll break you, if I have to do it with my own two hands!"

" 'Ighly moral, all of a sudden, ain't yer?" said the mate uneasily.

Black John clenched his fists and took a step forward. The mate backed away from him, smiling foolishly.

"All right, all right——no offense!"

"That'll do, then. I've warned you!"

Lappett laughed.

"I dunno what made you think I'd any intention of goin' through with that plan. If it's any 'elp to makin' you believe I mean what I say, I'll give you my word of honor, sir, that I've no intention of touchin' the stuff. You may search me, sir—me or my room—any day that you choose. You'll find nothin'!"

Black John gave a nod of his head.

"That's good, mister. An' now I must have a bit of a sleep. I'm just about dead."

The mate left the room, swearing to himself.

The —— old gorilla! Interferin' old fool! —— him! Let him wait! Sooner or later he'd go too far, and he'd have knotted his own noose! The miserable old cut-throat! ——! There wasn't a law Black John hadn't broken one time or another; an' now he was actin' like he was pious!

Lappett climbed down the ladder on the bridge-deck.

HANNIGAN and Garle, the little white-faced deck-hand, approached, carrying the sailors' tea for the forecastle.

Lappett considered swiftly. Even now, there was a chance he might save his profits. Hannigan was the kind of man who would jump at a chance of earning an honest penny. Hannigan would help.

The two deck-hands passed him.

He followed quickly.

"Hannigan," he said in a low voice, "just a second."

Hannigan halted under the wing of the lower bridge at the head of the ladder leading down to the forward well-deck, a mess-kid in his hands.

"Remember me tellin' you about a friend of mine?" the mate asked.

Hannigan shook his head.

"Limehouse Larry!" whispered the mate.

"Oh, ah!" Hannigan nodded.

"I'll see you ashore as soon as I've had my tea. There's money in it."

"Right!" said Hannigan.

And that was that, reflected Lappett. The old man would monkey with him, would he! Try and queer his game, would he! Let him try! A tough egg like Hannigan was worth six of Black John, any day!

Black John leaned over the rail of the lower bridge and watched Hannigan walk forward to the forecastle. He had not been able to hear all that had passed, perhaps, but he had heard sufficient to guess that Lappett had thrown his word aside like an old shoe. Hannigan. Now where had he seen Hannigan? When? On what page of the forgotten past would he find him? And what had Hannigan to do with Limehouse Larry? Hannigan would bring the cocaine on board the *Medea!* Mr. Lappett, keeping his word of honor, unsmirched, would know nothing about the transaction. Honest Mr. Lappett! And somehow Black John's weariness left him. He would sleep, yes, but not for a long time. He had work to do before bedtime; work of much importance.

MR. LAPPETT was feeling even more pleased with himself than usual.

His night ashore was proving a success. Things were coming his way more easily than he had dared anticipate. At the thought of Black John Dorrock, he chuckled and grinned and laughed silently, doubling up and thumping the table with his knuckles so that the lady seated opposite asked him languidly to share the joke, and was he going to ask her to have something to drink, and talking was dry work, didn't he think so!

Mr. Lappett, having made sure that Black John had not followed him, had had a short but not unsatisfactory interview with a worried, broken wreck of a man who lived in a cheap house in a shabby street near the Citadel and complained querulously of the bitterness of life.

He had then drifted down-town again and picked up Hannigan, to whom he gave certain explicit instructions which he must carry out without fail. Hannigan had been the one blot on a successful evening, having demanded an extra two pounds over and above the pound that had been offered and at first accepted.

Even then, so he had said, he was doing the job cheap. No one would be fool enough to give a man a quid for carrying a small suitcase aboard ship, unless there was something in the suitcase that was either particularly valuable or particularly dangerous. He wasn't frightened, he said, but, after all, three quid was little enough for doing a job that should have been worth five. Mr. Lappett had paid him his money under protest.

After that, not wishing to run any risk of being seen talking to one of the deck-hands, he had left Hannigan to fetch the suitcase from Limehouse Larry's friend and had departed in search of whisky.

And so, his troubles ended for the time, he sat in an upper back room of a little restaurant kept by a Dutchman who had sailed as a quartermaster in British ships until advancing years and increasing weight and a loving wife had combined to induce him to give up the sea and settle down to a life of respectability and profit on shore.

Mr. Lappett, an old friend, was made welcome. Life became worth living. A rather stout but affable lady who said that she had known him years before in New York, which statement Mr. Lappett very much doubted, seated herself at the same table and entertained him with gossip concerning the aristocracy of Europe and America and other celebrities in whom Mr. Lappett had hitherto taken no great interest. Nevertheless the stout lady made him laugh, and so he tolerated her company.

Later he discovered that the stout lady was drinking champagne at, apparently, his expense and at his invitation.

"Did I say 'champagne?' " he asked.

"You sure did!" said his friend. "You wouldn't expect a lady to drink that horrid whisky, would you! Why, George, you gotter remember the time was when I was an intimate friend of royalty!"

Mr. Lappett observed rather sourly that his name was Fortescue.

"Of course it is!" said the stout lady, drawing in her chin. "Forty, dear, shall I tell you about an elegant feller I knew once back in Yurrup who was a prince?"

Mr. Lappett was bored. He yawned and glanced wearily around the room which but for himself and his companion and two men sitting drinking in a corner was now empty. He decided that he had better get rid of the stout lady and return to the ship.

The stout lady sipped her champagne in a lady-like manner, befitting one who has known royalty, and talked pensively of her golden past. Had it not been for the inevitable riot that would have resulted Mr. Lappett would have told her to hold her tongue and not make a fool of herself.

And then he stiffened into attention and turned quickly in his chair as the voice of the chief engineer came to him clearly from the other side of a curtain that hung from a brass rod projecting from the wall, a screen against the draft that blew fiercely whenever the door was opened.

"Jock, I'm leavin' the sea!"

That in itself was enough to make Mr. Lappett wildly curious. MacGish, obviously half-drunk from the way he spoke, was talking of leaving the sea! Impossible! This was evidently the opinion of MacGish's friend, who resembled MacGish in that he, too, was Scotch and extremely drunk.

"Ye're leavin' the sea! Is that a fac'? An' is that the great secret you've been gaun to tell me a' ev'nin'!"

"Aye," said MacGish, "I'm leavin' the sea! It a'most brings tears to ma e'en when I think o't, laddie, but I maun!"

"What fur maun ye?"

"Maun I what?" said MacGish, who seemed to have considerable difficulty in following the conversation. He continued slowly and elaborately. "Man, Jock, did I tell ye that I had mad' up ma mind that the time had come to gi'e up the sea?"

"Ye did, Mac. But ye didna mean it! Ye canna!"

"Why not?"

"Ye'd starve! What way wud ye earn a livin'?"

Mr. Lappett craned his neck sideways and leant back in his chair the better to hear what might come next. But the stout lady patted his hand.

"An' so, Forty, the prince he ses to me, 'Dearie, I'll wait for you all my life!' "

The stout lady droned on peacefully.

"Mac, dae ye mean it?"

"I dae," said MacGish. "This is ma last v'yage in the auld *Medea!*" He chuckled. "Fur a vera guid reason—aye, ma last v'yage! An' then I'm dune wi' the sea!"

"A-weel, ye surprize me! Gang on, Mac! What's in yer mind?"

"Ah, ha! There's secrets e'en frae you, Jock! I can say nae mair than that the auld man an' masel' are gaun into a vera profitable scheme of earnin' an honest penny! I needna tell ye, Jock, that we're rinnin' a risk; a vera grave risk; but it's worth it! It isna the first time that Black John an' masel' ha'e rin in harness an' broken the law, but it's likely the last! We're playin' fur big stakes. If we win, Jock, it's big money; but, dod, if we lose, it's the clink! Aye——"

MacGish lowered his voice. Lappett could not hear what he said.

"Aye, is that a fac'?" The friend seemed lost in admiration. "An' are ye thinkin' o' settlin' in Glesga or whaur?"

"Jock, no. We live an' learn! I've ower many frien's to be eskin' me questions hoo I come by ma money! I've a mind, Jock, if ye were in earnest aboot that partnership ye were tellin' me of; I've a mind to settle in Halifax an' pit ma money into the business!"

"Man, ye'll ne'er regret it! MacGish, you listen to me. Noo, I'm speakin' the truth

when I say that the turn-over last year was greater than the year before——"

Mr. Lappett had heard enough.

The stout lady was still talking drowsily, her head nodding, her fingers tightly clenched around the stem of her wine glass, her eyes glazed.

"An' so this feller I was talkin' about, the prince, he ses to me, 'Kiddo, le's chase off by 'sel's, you'n me—an' we'll—we'll——' "

Mr. Lappett rose to his feet and opened the door quietly and went out, leaving the stout lady still talking into her wine glass.

HE SETTLED his bill down-stairs in the little front room, said good-night to the Dutch quartermaster and his fat wife and hurried off.

The night was bitterly cold, but to Mr. Lappett, pondering on what he had just heard, it might have been June.

He made his way quickly to the wharf where the *Medea* was lying. A strange excitement gripped him. In the face of what MacGish had said it was clear that he and Black John were mixed up in a deal that would, if successful, bring them in much profit, but which, if a failure, would land them in prison. And Dorrock, the miserable old hypocrite, who was not above doing a piece of crooked work for his own pocket, had dared interfere with him.

The mate laughed under his breath as he reached the *Medea's* gangway. Perhaps Black John was smuggling, also; if not cocaine and opium, something just as likely to lead to trouble, if found.

And then as he stood on the deck another possibility flashed into his mind—a possibility so stupendous and awe-inspiring that he had to stop by the bunker hatch and consider.

Suppose that Black John and MacGish, as likely a pair of blackguards as ever walked, had been bribed by Grinton to scuttle the *Medea!*

The mate cast back in his mind for facts that would fit in with his new-born theory, and he found more than sufficient to make him realize that if he could only, by some miracle of luck or judgment, fit fact and theory together to produce the necessary proof, then he would not only hold Dorrock, but also Grinton, in the hollow of his hand.

There would be pickings, great and immediate pickings, and a never-ending source of income in the future.

Mr. Lappett, however, was of a fearful nature. The thought of Black John and his grim smile and the glitter in his fierce eyes and his huge shoulders and his strength sobered him. In dealing with Dorrock he would have need of all his craft and cunning. Even so, he might suffer.

The matter was too vast, he decided, for him to tackle single-handed, or without much cautious planning.

He felt that if he only had some one whose advice he could ask, some one of intelligence and discretion on whose judgment he could rely, some one to whom speaking the truth was a habit rather than a luxury, then he would be able to see his way more clearly.

And then he remembered the second mate.

Jimmy Kerrill hated Black John as much as he did. Jimmy was honest, stupidly honest, one of those —— fools who would run themselves into all kinds of danger simply because they imagined they were doing right, uncovering deceit and trickery, and bilge like that, without making themselves objectionable when the time came to share out the profits.

Moreover, and this weighed considerably with Mr. Lappett, Jimmy Kerrill was afraid of nothing, not even, apparently, of Black John.

Jimmy Kerrill would be the man. Already a weight had been lifted from Mr. Lappett's shoulders.

Garle, the little deck-hand, whom he had chosen as night watchman, leaned over the rail by the port alleyway that led to the galley and the engineer's mess-room, smoking and gazing aft over the well-deck toward the poop.

Mr. Lappett, who had told Hannigan to wait for him whatever might happen, before going forward to the forecastle, walked slowly toward him.

Garle straightened himself up quickly and backed into the alleyway.

Mr. Lappett saw that there was no one in the galley.

"Warm enough?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you, sir," said Garle, rather surprized by the mate's kindness. "Yes, sir."

"Hannigan come on board yet?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Lappett grunted and turned away. He walked along the bridge-deck to the saloon and tapped at the second mate's door.

"Come in," said a voice.

JIMMY KERRILL looked up from a letter that he was writing to Eileen Mavison. A not very interesting letter, Jimmy knew, but what was a man to write that a girl like Eileen would want to read?

"Hullo, James, been ashore?"

"For about half an hour only, with Sandy Racken," said Jimmy, wondering what on earth had brought the mate to worry him at this time of night.

"Ah!" Without waiting for an invitation the mate plumped himself down on the settee. "Jimmy, I want to talk to you."

And, after all, mused Jimmy, why should Eileen Mavison be expected to care what happened to a second mate? Perhaps she had already forgotten him.

"Well!" he said, remembering the mate. "Well, mister!"

Mr. Lappett decided to ignore the abruptness in the second mate's tone.

"Jimmy, there's somethin' goin' on I'm bound to get to the bottom of. Somethin' fishy an' under'and!"

But she had asked him to write, hadn't she? Why would she have said that, if she had been going to forget him, eh?

With a little sigh, Jimmy withdrew his thoughts from Eileen Mavison and gave all his attention to Mr. Lappett.

"Don't get you," he said. "How do you mean, underhand?"

"Well, it's this way. I keep my ears open and my eyes open an' when I find fellers actin' suspicious an' things happenin' for which there ain't no accountin', in a manner o' speakin', then I look for a motive."

"Talking riddles or what?" asked Jimmy, watching the mate's large, yellow, tight-skinned face with the pale eyes and the small hooked nose. "What's the game? No use you coming here and telling me you've got anything against me, Mr. Lappett, because I won't stand for it! See! I'm clean-handed. And if you want trouble I'll heave you out of here on to your blasted head, mate or no mate!"

" 'Ere, chuck that!" said Mr. Lappett, uneasily. "I wasn't referrin' to you, Jim, at all! See! Now, you listen 'ere! You're a straight kind of young feller, aren't you?"

"Well!" said Jimmy, suspiciously.

"If you 'eard Black John Dorrock was plannin' a —— crooked deal, you'd think it yer duty to 'elp me stop it, wouldn't you?"

"What is it?"

"Nothin' definite. Not yet. But I got my suspicions, Jim, that the old man's a wrong 'un! He talks pious, but he's rotten, through an' through."

"What the —— are you gassing about, mister? What's the game?"

"If I tell you," said Mr. Lappett, "don't you jump into the air an' say it ain't possible, because it is. I know human nature, boy, you don't. An' remember, we've got to catch Black John with the goods, as the sayin' goes, or he beats us! See! No warnin' him. No givin' him a hint here or a hint there that we've guessed what 'e's after! That wouldn't do. The old man ain't acted just right. He's treated you bad, an' 'e's treated me bad. Understand! He's rank poison, Dorrock is, an' 'e don't need no —— pity!"

Jimmy frowned. For a long time he sat staring at the mate before he spoke.

"What's it matter even if he has treated us bad? So far as I know he's as good as any one else I'm ever likely to have to say 'sir' to, and besides, suppose you do find anything definite, what good will it do? You'll maybe—if you're —— lucky—land him in prison. If you're unlucky, he'll just about kill you!" Jimmy shook his head. "Mr. Lappett, I'm not interested in getting any one shoved into clink! Not even Black John! Not even you!"

Mr. Lappett grunted.

"Jimmy, listen here! Puttin' Black John into prison ain't no part of my scheme. But he stands to pull off a crooked deal for money. See! I owe him one for a mean, low-down, lousy trick that he played on me. See? All right, then; the way to punish him, Jimmy, is this—grab his profits! Hold him up! See?"

"In other words," said Jimmy, "you're aiming to let him go through with the deal, whatever it is, and then you'll step in and tell him if he doesn't divvy up, you'll squeal! Blackmail, eh!"

"That ain't a nice word to use, James. What we'll do is to tell him in advance that we know 'is plans an' what does 'e propose to do in the matter. See! That is, o' course, if we can dope out the evidence."

"I see," said Jimmy. "And having gone as far as that, Mr. Lappett, what do you think Dorrock's up to?"

Mr. Lappett wiped the sweat from his forehead and went on.

"Jimmy, I 'eard the chief engineer talkin' tonight to a friend. He was canned an' sayin' more than he'd 'ave said if 'e'd been sober. Even so, it wouldn't amount to nothin', only I happen to know enough to give me a clue. My idea is, Dorrock's been bribed by old Grinton, back home, to scuttle the *Medea!*"

"What's that!" said Jimmy. Grinton, Eileen Mavison's step-father, bribing Dorrock to scuttle the *Medea!* "Rubbish," he said. "I don't believe it."

"It's the truth," said Lappett doggedly. "We got to stop it."

Had Mr. Lappett not realized already that he had done wrong in seeking Jimmy Kerrill's advice what followed would have banished any lingering doubts that he might have had.

"Mr. Lappett," said Jimmy, thrusting his face close to his and glaring at him, "you're a miserable blackmailer! You don't care a —— what happens! What you want is money! I don't believe a word about Grinton or the old man! What do you take me for, a ruddy lunatic? Clear out!"

He opened the door of his room and Mr. Lappett stumbled out into the alleyway.

"You're as soft," he said, "as a —— preacher! One o' these days you'll see I got more sense than you give me credit for—you——"

The door slammed.

"You —— fool!" finished Mr. Lappett.

And then he went out on deck to find Hannigan.

A dark figure emerged from the doorway of the fiddley.

Mr. Lappett halted by the No. 3 hatch.

"That you, Hannigan?" he said.

"It's me all right."

"Where's the suitcase?"

"Dunno."

"What's that?" Mr. Lappett checked the flow of words that rose to his tongue. "What the —— do you mean?"

And then a feeling of horror swept over him as he saw the blood on Hannigan's face and the purple blotches and the cut lips.

"What do I mean!" said Hannigan slowly. "I mean, mister, that some one took that suitcase off me."

"Why did you let him, you—you——"

"That 'ull do, mister. If you think that I gave the goods up, you're wrong! I'm a scrapper, same as I told yer. So was the other feller. Only he had the advantage. But I'll get him—understand! I'll get him——"

"But the suitcase!" Mr. Lappett groaned. "Man, you don't know what it means to me!"

"Wouldn't have tried, if I hadn't have guessed. It's gone an' the stuff in it. See. An', mister, if you got any idea in your head that I double crossed you, drop it! I'd have risked it with you, twenty times, but not with a man like Limehouse Larry mixed up in it. But that feller that fought me—" a gap showed in his teeth when he grinned—"I'll get him. Leave it to me! I owe him for more'n tonight."

He turned away.

"Hold hard!" said Mr. Lappett. "Who was the man that took the stuff off you?"

Hannigan blinked at him and then shook his head.

"That's tellin'."

He walked slowly forward toward the forecastle.

BLACK JOHN DORROCK sat on the settee in his room on the lower bridge, with a cigar in his mouth and a glass of brandy on the wash-stand beside him. From time to time his hard features would relax into a wide mouthed smile and he would chuckle immoderately.

On the floor in front of him was a battered leather suitcase with a broken lock and scattered around were tins of opium and packages of cocaine.

Many things had puzzled Garle, the deckhand, since the *Medea* had left Cardiff, but nothing had seemed quite so mysterious or queer or inexplicable as when that night in Halifax the captain had come creeping aft from his cabin to the poop and there had spent some minutes when he might have been sound asleep in his blankets hurling little packages as far out into the harbor as was possible.

Garle slipped into the shadows of the alleyway as Black John climbed the ladder from the after-deck.

"That you, watchman?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see what I was doin' just now?"

"No sir," said Garle. This was one of the times when to speak the truth was simply asking for trouble. "No, sir, I didn't."

"That's right. You'd better not. Don't even say that you saw me! Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Like the mate, Garle was of a timorous nature; not for anything would he have broken his promise.

EARLY the next morning when the steward came into his room with a can of hot water and a cup of tea, Black John Dorrock raised his head from the pillow and nodded toward the suitcase on the floor.

"Flotter, take that suitcase to Mr. Lappett. Tell him I found it last night an' I've reason to believe it's his property!"

"Very good, sir," said Flotter.

Later in the morning he told the cook in the galley that the language the mate had used when he saw his suitcase had scared him.

"I ain't wot you'd call sensitive, Tommy, nor I ain't above slingin' a few curses around, meself. But I never yet—an' I been goin' to sea long enough to 'ave 'ad experience—never yet 'ave I 'eard any one equal the mate when it come to expressin' his feelin's. I tell yer, Tommy, if he'd been struck dead at me feet, I wouldn't have been surprized!"

"What riled him?" asked the cook.

"Dunno," said the steward. "'Is suitcase was broke. P'r'aps it was that!"

VIII

THE simple-minded sailor may be forgiven if he regard civilization with a certain cynicism born of experience. However much the water-fronts of the world may differ in speech and habit and manners, this one unfailing characteristic they have in common: the sailor is the legitimate prey of the landsman.

Jimmy Kerrill and Sandy Racken, returning late at night to the s.s. *Medea* lying at a Hudson River Pier, loading cargo for the United Kingdom, saw ahead of them on the same side of the deserted street a broad-shouldered man walking slowly in the same direction as themselves.

"That feller's drunk," said Sandy suddenly.

The broad-shouldered man staggered slightly and then stopped as if to steady himself and walked slowly on.

"A sailor, o' course," said Sandy.

Jimmy was not interested. Drunken sailors on the New York water-front were too common a sight to arouse even a passing curiosity.

"Asking for trouble, if he hasn't had it already," he said. "Wonder how much money he's had pinched from him since he came ashore!"

"Wouldn't have much to pinch if he belonged to one of old Grinton's hookers," said Sandy. "Would he?"

"No, he'd have been buying food the same as us!"

"Grinton's a beauty!" Sandy chuckled. "Jimmy, have you heard from the girl? If it's not too personal a question, my lad!"

"Who do you mean?" Jimmy asked.

"You know. Miss Mavison. Man, you don't tell me you're not expectin' a letter, surely!"

"Why should I!" said Jimmy, frowning. "Miss Mavison's no more to me, Sandy, then—why, than that girl yonder!"

He nodded to where on the other side of the street a man and a girl had appeared from a dark alley and stood at a corner under a lamp, talking.

"That's stupid!" said Sandy.

"It is," Jimmy agreed. "She's a friend, of course. But she's no more, Sandy. Miss Mavison's not the kind of girl to look at a stiff like me, Sandy, unless it's to laugh—and why should she? She's too rich, to begin with!"

"She wouldn't laugh, Jimmy, anyway!"

"No," Jimmy agreed once more, "she wouldn't. She's too nice."

"An' as for bein' rich," said Sandy, "what the ——'s that got to do with it?"

"Lots!" said Jimmy briefly.

"Jimmy, don't be a fool! Don't say that you don't like her, either! You do!"

"Of course I like her," said Jimmy. "But——"

He broke off abruptly.

"Sandy, look there!"

The girl had crossed the street and was speaking to the drunken man, who paid no heed to her but kept unsteadily on his way, his hands in his pockets, his hard-brimmed hat on the side of his head.

The girl caught hold of his arm and swung him around.

"The female of the species," said Sandy, "is more deadly than the male! Kip was right there, Jimmy, wasn't he!"

"Why, it's Black John!" said Jimmy. "See him!"

He quickened his pace.

"Come on, Sandy."

"You leggo my arm or I'll fesh police!"

Black John, from the tone of his voice, had not yet lost his dignity of manner, but he was extremely annoyed.

The girl laughed at him.

"What's yer hurry?"

Black John swayed on his feet and scowled.

"Think I was born yesterday, or what? Beat it!"

As if that had been the signal the girl raised a shrill and wailing cry, and her man friend came running across the street, oozing virtue, as Sandy afterward put it, at every pore.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"He's been robbin' me!" said the girl. "The mis'rable crook. He's took my money!"

"What d'you mean?" said the man fiercely. "What d'you mean? Give my wife back her money!"

Jimmy stood by the entrance of a tall ware-house and listened. The situation was as old as the sea. Black John was no friend of his. Nevertheless——

"Stole my money!" wailed the girl.

"Give it up, or I'll make youse!" said the man.

"Look here!" said Black John who had freed himself from the girl's grasp. "You—you lemme 'lone—'spec'ble cit'zen! G'ome!"

Sandy sniggered.

"Unless you come across with the money you're pinched," said the woman's friend, "I'll call the cops!"

"Come on, Sandy!"

Jimmy shouldered his way through the fringe of night birds that had collected to watch what would inevitably follow.

"Here, we want that man. Been trailing him all night."

A glimmer of interest showed in Black John's glassy stare.

"Who the —— are youse?" snapped the injured husband. "What yer mean, want him!"

"We're taking him in charge. Prisoner. See!"

This evidently was more than the injured husband or his equally injured wife were prepared to tackle.

They glanced at each other uneasily.

"Huh!" said the girl. "You're English!"

"Where's yer badges?" said the man.

"Badges!" Long acquaintance with moving pictures had made Jimmy Kerrill acquainted with the habits and customs of American crooks and the appurtenances of authority. "Badges!" He laughed. "We don't need badges, friend. We're from Scotland Yard, London. This man's been chased half-way round Europe and America. If you don't believe us, come on to the nearest police station, and I'll show you my warrant."

But the man and the woman had retired from the contest. One question only did the woman ask.

"What do youse want him for?"

"Murder!" said Jimmy. "Killed a woman who tried to rob him of his week's wages!"

He took hold of Black John Dorrock's arm.

"Come on, now, step lively! Put the bracelets on him, Sandy, if he gives any trouble!"

A laugh went up from the crowd as Black John Dorrock was marched off and a voice drawled:

"Say, they're kiddin' yuh! Say, can't youse see they're kiddin' yuh!"

Jimmy glanced over his shoulder. Already the man and the girl were walking away in the other direction.

"All right, captain," he said. "They've gone."

"Good work, gem'n!" said Black John. He chuckled. "Thank you. Mush obliged if you'll keep y'arms where they are! See! Prishn'r or no prishn'r, I'm drunk. Legsh are, anyway. Head, shob'r'n judge'n jury. I'd ha' killed that man if he'd come near'r me. Hold up, o'coursh!"

"What were you doing by yourself, sir?"

"The chief eng'neer was with me. MacGish. Dunno where'sh now, mis'r. Old Mac, eh! Been with frien'sh. Big ni'. Wanted ex'cish!"

He mumbled to himself and for a time said nothing further.

And then when they were approaching the *Medea* he gave a deep sigh and pulled his arms free and began to speak in a more natural tone.

"Better now. Inexcusable, gem'n! Gettin' drunk, my age, eh! Old enough know be'r!"

He stopped and stared, first at the second engineer, then at Jimmy, from under his black bushy eyebrows.

"Drink's the quickest way to forget. Tonight I wanted to forget. Had bad news

from home. Aye, bad news, Mr. Kerrill!"

Jimmy scarcely knew what to say. Black John Dorrock, in a temper, sneering, foul of speech, or dumb sullen, was the man he knew. But this rather drunk, sorry-looking man, mumbling and muttering about having had bad news from home, this was a new Black John Dorrock, altogether, one whom he had never imagined possible.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "Very."

"Aye," Black John nodded. "Bad news! Did you know my wife's ill? Cough. Yes, my wife's ill. An' what can I do to help? Nothin'. Not yet." He tapped Jimmy on the chest. "But, little while—little while, mister—then, she'll have everything she wants—money, heaps of it!"

He nodded his head again.

"I'm very glad," said Jimmy.

"You are!" said Black John in a tone of surprize. "Are you now? Glad, eh! Whaffor! Mister—" he lowered his voice—"mister, we're slaves! Get that —— song out yer mind about Britons no' be'n' slaves! Tha's a' ri', dry lan', but sea, sailors, no—norrabit! We're slaves—you an' me, mister, an' old Grinton's our mas'r!"

With no attempt to explain what he had been trying to say he stalked up the *Medea's* gang-plank to the bridge-deck.

"Well," said Sandy, "what d'you make of it, eh?"

"Dunno!" said Jimmy.

They went aboard and stood, talking together, by the bunker hatch. Then Sandy yawned.

"I'm goin' to turn in. G'night, Jimmy."

"Good night, Sandy."

Jimmy, still puzzled by what Black John had said, entered the alleyway that led to the saloon and the steward's pantry and his own room.

AS HE fumbled in his pocket for his key he heard the thud of heavy feet overhead. For a moment he hesitated, uncertain whether to investigate or not, and then a louder thud, as of a heavy weight falling, and a muffled shout, decided him, and he ran out of the alleyway on to the bridge-deck.

On the lower bridge, in the narrow space between the jolly boat and the captain's room, two men were fighting. One man was kneeling on the other, apparently squeezing his throat with both hands and trying to strangle him.

Jimmy raced up the ladder.

"What the ——'s the matter here? Get off him!"

He grabbed the man who was kneeling by the back of his collar and pulled him to his feet.

The man wrenched himself free and he recognized Hannigan.

"Hannigan!" he said.

Hannigan aimed a kick at the head of the man he had been trying to strangle and Jimmy hit him under the ear.

Hannigan turned. For a moment he and Jimmy stood facing each other in the pale moonlight. Then Hannigan uttered a low growl and sprang. Jimmy met him with a straight left that reached his jaw. In return Jimmy was hurled against the boat by a drive in the chest.

Before he could move Hannigan had rushed him and was battering his body with fierce half-arm blows, left, right, left, right, at his body. Jimmy crouching, covering his face, knew that in sheer strength Hannigan was his master, nevertheless Hannigan had been drinking; already his blows were less powerful. Jimmy thrust him from him, dodging his arms, stepped to one side and wheeled around, clear of the boat.

"Come on!" sneered Hannigan. "We ain't runnin'. Fight!"

Jimmy, knowing that if Hannigan once got a grip on his body, he was beaten, slammed his left into the deck-hand's stomach.

Hannigan grunted and gave way a pace, then, growling angrily, shaking his head like a terrier throwing off sea-water, he bored in once more, hitting savagely.

Jimmy crashed against one of the iron stanchions of the upper bridge and came back, flicking Hannigan's nose with his right. As Hannigan raised his chin, he staggered him with a blow on his throat.

"Now's yer time!" said a hard voice from the darkness. "Go in, son—sharp! Follow it up!"

Jimmy obeyed. He hated Hannigan intensely. He had an overpowering desire to smash the grinning, truculent face in front of him. He wanted to prove how different was this fight from the fight in the forecastle when Hannigan had almost crushed the life out of him.

They fought in grim silence. Jimmy, breathing in quick jerks between clenched teeth, knew that he was hitting Hannigan

where and when he liked; knew also that he was being hit, yet felt no pain from Hannigan's blows; knew gradually that Hannigan was weakening from the effect of his. He was winning. Hannigan, —— him, was done—finished—licked!

He dodged a wild swing and countered with his left, full on the deck-hand's mouth. Hannigan, blast him, was out! He drove his right savagely on to Hannigan's chin, his left crashed into his stomach once more. Then he drew back as Hannigan dropped on hands and knees, groaning, fighting for breath.

Hannigan was out.

"Mister, boot him in the face while he's bendin'!" said the hard voice that he had heard dimly when he was fighting.

"You go to the ——!" said Jimmy.

"Boot him, mister, or I will."

"If you touch him," said Jimmy, "I'll start on you!"

He turned and found Black John by his side.

"All right, all right! If you think he's had enough, well an' good—only, bear in mind, mister, if he'd got you down he'd have ground his hob nails into yer face, as he'd have done to me if you hadn't come up when you did!"

"Was it you he was tryin' to choke?" Jimmy asked.

"You bet!" said Dorrock. He spoke to Hannigan who was trying to stand, groping for the rail of the bridge. "Here, you, cut out the actin'! Get to your feet! An' clear out o' this, or I'll kick you down the ladder. Make haste!"

Hannigan went, without answering. He seemed dazed; his shoulders sagged; he had the back of his right hand to his eyes.

As soon as he had gone, Jimmy spoke to Black John.

"Going to log him or what?" he asked. "You ought to hand him over to the police!"

"What's that? Hand him over to the police! No, mister. He's been punished sufficient. Ain't he?"

Jimmy pondered. The more he studied the old man the more puzzled he became.

"But," said he, "if that's so, why'd you tell me to boot him in the face just now?"

"Why not? You were scrappin' with him, weren't you? You steam-boat mates make me tired; too soft, mister, too soft! Where'd you have been in the old days on a Cape Horner, with a crowd brought aboard by the Frisco crimps, eh? An', besides, mister, that man Hannigan, now, him an' me, we got a debt to settle! Wouldn't be fair to take advantage of my position an' run him in, just for that! No, mister, don't you believe it!"

"But he attacked you, didn't he, sir?"

"He did, when I wasn't lookin'. When I was canned. Fat chance he'd have had of gettin' me otherwise, mister!"

Jimmy had nothing to say. The whole affair seemed strange and absurd even to him, to whom nothing on board ship would have been impossible.

"An', besides, mister, Hannigan owes me somethin', anyway. I gave him a lickin' once an' he's aimin' to get even, by lickin' me! But he can't. Another thing, since you're askin' so many —— fool questions, mister, I've an idea in my brain-box Hannigan an' me met before one time, but where or when, by the holy poker, I'm —— if I remember!"

He moved away, but stopped and came back to Jimmy.

"Mister," he growled, "you did me a good turn just now. That Cardiff crimp would have killed me if you hadn't come! I won't forget. Never. Mebbe I'll do you a good turn before I've finished. See! An', listen, I was wrong in my estimate of yer! Understand! Led to believe there was somethin' ag'in' yer! There ain't. Good night, mister."

He stumped off, then, to the door of his room on the other side of the lower bridge.

JIMMY, bewildered beyond bewilderment, went down the ladder to the bridge deck and walked slowly aft. He was glad that he had smashed Hannigan. The memory of his fight in the forecastle had rankled; but his ribs ached from Hannigan's heavy blows and he could scarcely see out of his right eye and he felt too restless and excited to sleep.

He passed the fiddley with the two Samson posts topped by cowled ventilators, connected by the grating known on board as the fireman's bridge, and the big funnel, and the saddle-back hatch, and the engine-room casing. He strolled under the iron supports of the boat-deck and he stood for a long time, leaning on the rail overlooking the after well-deck.

The events of the evening had startled him. Things had been happening on board

of which he had had no knowledge. It seemed now, casting back over the voyage, that the old man and the mate and Hannigan—Hannigan, of all people, a deck hand—were all of them mixed up in some conspiracy of hate and spite and jealousy. That something was wrong somewhere was obvious, even to himself, who had seen nothing, but where or how it was impossible to say.

Jimmy raised his arms and yawned. He was dog tired and sore, but still not sleepy. No sound came to his ears but the distant hooting of a steamer from the direction of the East River, and the clanging of an engine-bell, and the throb of a tug-boat's engines.

A sudden fancy took possession of him to walk to the poop and have a look at the steamer moored astern of the *Medea*, before going to his room.

He climbed down the ladder on to the well-deck. As he reached the No. 4 hatch he paused and listened. Some one was moving in the hold. Then he saw that part of the tarpaulin cover had been thrown back and that one of the hatches had been moved. Cautiously he leaned over the coaming.

Presently, far down in the blackness, he caught sight of the beam of an electric torch, moving slowly from side to side.

His first impulse was to raise his voice and ask who was in the hold.

Then he decided to wait.

Five minutes later, the yellow circle of light had vanished. Whoever had been in the hold was climbing the iron ladder.

Jimmy drew back.

A man's head appeared over the coaming, a head and a hand, and then another hand and a pair of shoulders, and then Jimmy recognized Mr. Lappett.

It was not until he had both feet on the deck that Jimmy spoke to him.

"Well, Mr. Lappett, what's wrong in the hold?"

Lappett turned with a sharp hiss as he caught his breath.

"What's that to do with you?" he snapped.

"Nothing," said Jimmy. "No harm in asking a civil question, is there?"

"No—cert'nly not. You startled me, that's all. I've been down in the hold, lookin' for somethin'."

"Found it!"

"I' ave!" said Mr. Lappett triumphantly. "What's more, my friend, I've found *'im!*"

"Ah!" said Jimmy. "Why didn't you bring him up, then?"

Mr. Lappett appeared annoyed.

"What I meant was," he said slowly, "that I've got him at last. Black John. See! Somethin' I 'eard this ev'nin', mister, give me the clue. I was right, mister. D'you hear? There's some crooked business afoot an' I'll get to the bottom of it, or my name ain't Fortescue Lappett!"

Altogether, thought Jimmy, not a quiet evening. No voyage on the same ship as a bunch like Black John Dorrock, Mr. Lappett and Hannigan could be entirely dull or uneventful.

He followed the mate slowly, leisurely, up the ladder and along the bridge-deck.

For the second time that night he took the key out of his pocket to unlock the door of his room.

"Mr. Kerrill, sir," said a voice.

He turned and saw the steward.

"Hullo, Flotter, not asleep yet?"

"I was, sir, but I woke up with a start, sir—must 'ave 'ad the nightmare—I could have swore I 'eard fellers fightin' over me head!"

"You were dreaming. That's what comes of too many of those ice-cream sodas! Stick to the hard stuff, Flotter—it's not such a strain on your inside!"

The steward grinned.

"You will 'ave your fun, Mr. Kerrill, won't you! There's a letter for you, sir, in the saloon—came aboard after you'd gone ashore."

"Oh!" said Jimmy. "Who's been writing to me, I wonder!"

Though the handwriting was strange to him, even before Jimmy had slit open the envelope and glanced at the name at the end of the last page he knew that the letter was from Eileen Mavison.

His heart was beating rather more fiercely than was comfortable or correct as he began to read:

DEAR MR. KERRILL:

I have not forgotten my promise to write to you and I am lonely enough to hope that you have not forgotten your promise to write to me, also.

I wish that I had seen more of you before you left. I am sorry that the renewed friendship of our childhood should have been marred by trouble. You were not to blame, I know. Sometimes elderly people, worried people—and my step-father has been much worried of late, I know—are apt to develop crankiness. They don't mean anything really, but it's what happens. And so I hope that

you will bear no malice. I am sure, indeed, that you will not.

Things have not been altogether happy since you went away. Mr. Jimmy Kerrill, I need a friend badly. I wish you were home. I am afraid I am not a very practical person and my tongue runs away with me, as perhaps my pen is doing at this minute, but if you were here I doubt not that I would be practical enough to go to you for advice and sympathy and help.

Men are queer beings. The more I study them, the more I learn. You think they like you, then you find it is only for some entirely outside reason: not for yourself, for instance, but for something you stand for.

If I were in trouble and wrote to you, would you help me? You would, wouldn't you? Things seem pretty dark and wretched sometimes.

When you reach home again, come and see me. You must! And, Mr. Jimmy Kerrill, it doesn't matter what things you hear about my step-father! They may be true or they may not. I can not say anything more definite than this. But whatever happens or does not happen, I want you for a friend. Promise!

I know what the North Atlantic is like in Winter. I know that the *Medea* is old and that she ought to have been repaired, or scrapped, even, at the end of her last voyage. Sometimes I wonder if we folk who live on dry land realize what you sailors must suffer and risk just to bring us our daily bread! Ships can be replaced, lives can't.

I think I am beginning to hate business more and more.

I must end now. Perhaps I have said too much. Perhaps I should have said more.

Your friend,

EILEEN MAVISON.

P.S. And again I was nearly forgetting to remind you that I still owe you that money you lent me when you found me again. I am not sending it to you. This means that you must come and see me when you reach home and make me refund my just debts.

Jimmy sat and stared at the letter. He wondered what Eileen had meant; what she was hinting!

And where—this was the most puzzling part of all—where, if she wanted a friend, was the red-faced young man, Archie Romer, whom Eileen had been going to marry?

IX

LATE in the afternoon Black John Dorrock sat in his sitting-room. The *Medea* would sail in the morning and he was busy—so busy that when some one tapped at the door he growled without looking up from his accounts.

The door opened and closed. He turned quickly in his chair and saw MacGish staring at him with the tight-lipped smile that he knew meant trouble.

"What's wrong, Mac?" he asked.

MacGish crossed over to his table and dropped on to the settee and spoke in a low voice.

"Johnny, he's after ye!"

Very deliberately Black John put down his pen.

"Who is?" he asked. "Hannigan?"

"Hannigan?" said the chief in a puzzled tone. "That deck-haun'—nae: Lappett!"

"The —— he is!" said Black John. "What for?"

"He suspects that you're gaun to scuttle the *Medea:* an' that I'm in wi' ye. He's been tryin' to pump me dry—eskin' questions, all wrapt up in silver paper! Get me! Sly kin' o' questions that ye'd think meant naethin' till ye got to studyin' them oot efter!"

"Did he say anything definite?"

"No. Not him. He disna ken onythin', an' I tell't him sae. He tried to mak' me believe that he'd heard frae anither pairrty that I'd been talkin'! Weel, he's a crookit wee twister an' he needs watchin'!"

"I'll watch him!" said Black John grimly. "I've had my eye on Mr. Lappett for some time."

"D'ye mind the nicht afore we left hame when he brocht ye the bottle o' brandy an' Mrs. Dorrock warned ye ag'in' him!"

"Well!"

"D'ye mind him talkin' aboot auld snake-face Grinton, as if him an' he were bosom frien's! D'ye think, John, that he'd heard onythin' frae that quarter, eh?"

"No," said Dorrock sharply. "Don't believe it. Grinton's a fool, but he ain't a —— fool! He knows, as well as I do, that he's only got to tell one livin' soul outside you an' me, an' the game's up! Busted sky-high! How's he think fellers like Lappett are goin' to keep secrets when they ain't grabbin' a rake-off, eh? No, Mac, Lappett's guessin'. It's a hold-up, sure! He'd better look out, Mr. —— Lappett had, or he'll be attendin' his own funeral service as principal an' only mourner!"

"It's a haud-up, o' coorse," said MacGish. "He's willin' to be bocht aff, frae the way he was hintin' things, tae!"

Black John broke into a laugh.

"I'll hint him. Mac, I'm in this deal for the money I get. I want it bad. My ——, Mac, I want it more'n I ever wanted money before! You an' me are takin' the risk an' sharin' the profit. That's

only right. If Lappett comes tryin' to horn in an' grab some of the cash, for doin' nothin', then he'll find he's made the mistake of his life. I'd break his dirty little neck sooner'n give him a copper!"

MacGish grinned and stood up.

"Weel, I'm awa. Mebbe he'll come an' see ye. He hintit as muckle. Said it wud be as weel fur me if I tuk him intae ma confidence! I tellt him he was sufferin' frae conclusions! That mad' him sair wi' me. He's in nae vera guid temper, I'm thinkin', puir wee dock-rat! A-weel, we live an' learn!"

As soon as MacGish had left him, Black John opened the cupboard beneath his book case and drew out an old fashioned service revolver. He emptied the six cartridges on to his table and pressed the trigger two or three times to make sure that the mechanism was well-oiled and in working order. Then he slipped the cartridges back into the chambers and put the revolver into his pocket.

He had settled down at his writing once more when another tap at the door interrupted him.

"Come in!" he said.

The water-clerk from the ship-agents entered.

"Some papers from the office, cap'n, an' a cable!"

"Oh, all right, son." He gazed at the envelope with a tightening of the muscles in his throat. "All right," he repeated. "Thankee."

A desperate anxiety took hold of him.

He was afraid. Terribly afraid. But for no reason.

Grinton was sending him instructions or a warning, —— him!

"You needn't wait, son; if there's anythin' that needs talkin' over, I'll come up to the office presently. I'll be up that way about five o'clock, anyway."

The clerk vanished.

Black John passed from his sitting-room into his bed-room, tore open the envelope and with trembling fingers unfolded the slip of paper.

For a moment his eyes were blurred.

Words appeared, typewritten on thin slips of paper, words that had no meaning. Grinton would never have sent a message like this—Grinton would never have signed his name, Muriel! Muriel—why, Muriel! Black John shivered. Muriel must be Maggie's sister—and so—and so——

Slowly, fixing his attention by sheer will-power, forcing himself to read the message once more and to understand—to understand—to understand—he read:

Maggie died last night.—MURIEL.

Black John raised his eyes and stared out through the port into the gray of the afternoon. And he saw, not the outline of the foremast and the derricks and the forecastle head, but the little house in the quiet street where Maggie, his Maggie, lay dead.

A sob broke from his throat. It was impossible—monstrous—not true, of course not—how could Maggie be dead when he was earning money to save her life?

Yes, that was it; he was going to save Maggie's life; they were to live in Madeira or Algiers, where it was warm in Winter and the sun shone; not in Cardiff where it was cold and wet and the mists from the Bristol Channel got on one's lungs and made one cough and cough——

Maggie was dead!

His senses were numbed. He suffered. God, how he suffered! He could scarcely think. His mind seemed dead—like Maggie.

He pulled open a drawer in his bureau and took out an old photograph, his favorite, Maggie, as she was when they had first married! He stared with burning eyes at the face he loved; Maggie, as he had first known her. She was a pretty girl, and she believed in him. Poor little Maggie! To the very end, she had trusted him. Other men might be dishonest and bad and mean, but her husband—never!

And then, their married life, what misery for her! What long drawn-out despair and wretchedness! Poverty! Failure! Maggie ill! Himself, the honest husband, Grinton's slave, crawling, doing his will, lying, cheating! And Maggie ill!

Oh, God! If only he had tried! If only he had kept steady!

And Maggie was dead!

He put his hands to his face and shed tears.

Old Black John snivelling like a kid! Old Black John whose wife had believed in him! Black John Dorrock, a crooked ship-master, who was going to scuttle his ship, because he was hard up and poor and——

He dropped his hands.

Going to scuttle his ship! Why, in —— name! What for? Because Grinton, that —— hypocrite, had promised him money, so that he might send Maggie to Madeira or Algiers or Switzerland, to get well!

Oh, God! God! God!

And then Black John's weakness left him. He felt like a man who has passed through deep waters, who has been face to face with death and still lives, alone—a solitary survivor!

Grinton—Grinton had refused him the money that would have saved Maggie. It was Grinton's fault! And Grinton wanted the *Medea* scuttled. Grinton was in need of money himself—in need of money!

Black John uttered a little moan of anguish, of despair, of grief.

In need of money or not, Grinton could have put his hand into his pocket and paid over sufficient to have taken Maggie away from Wales—to a warm climate—to have kept her alive!

And now Maggie was dead! Maggie, his sweetheart! His wife! Maggie was dead!

HOW long he sat in his chair, doubled up, elbows on his knees, his head in his hands, staring at Maggie's picture, he did not know; but the short January day was closing in, dusk was falling and the big arc lamps showed through the port when once more there came a tapping at his door.

He rose to his feet.

"Come in," he said roughly. "Come in."

Mr. Lappett entered.

"Oh!" said Black John. "Oh, it's you, is it? I'd a kind of idea at the back of my mind you might be droppin' in for a talk, mister. Come on in, an' sit down." He passed from his bed-room into the sitting-room where Lappett stood. "Well, well! An' how's the world usin' you today, eh? Stevedores givin' any trouble?"

Mr. Lappett was so startled that he found speech a difficulty. Black John's air of friendliness and good fellowship was a trap, undoubtedly. Well, so much the worse for Black John. Traps sometimes caught the trapper.

"Well!" Black John raised his black eyebrows ironically. "Well, mister, I'm waitin'. What is it? We ain't had none of our little talks lately, have we? Not since I found that suitcase o' yours! You never thanked me for findin' it an' returnin' it, did you? Like to know where I put the contents, eh?"

But the effort was too much. Maggie was dead. He could pretend no longer. Maggie was dead: and he was acting—pretending——

Lappett was gazing at him with a look in his yellow, tight-skinned face that was half-way between a sneer and a snarl.

"For —— sake, Lappett, get on with it! Get on with it! Think I've got nothin' to do than to stand here an' watch you open an' shut your mouth! What brought you here?"

Mr. Lappett began, very slowly and distinctly, like a boy reciting a lesson learnt by heart.

"Captain Dorrock," he said, "we're leavin' tomorrow, all bein' well. I thought, bearin' that in mind, sir, I'd slip in 'ere an' discuss a matter o' business."

He looked at Black John craftily to observe what effect the statement might have. But Black John's countenance remained the same, a grim, black browed mask, showing neither interest nor surprize nor anything save deep gloom.

"Yes, sir," Mr. Lappett continued, "a matter o' business. Since leavin' Cardiff, sir, I've been usin' my eyes, an' I've seen one or two things, sir, that 'ud take some explainin' away in an Admiralty Court back in London. Mebbe, you don't need me to say no more!"

"On the contrary," said Black John, "now you've begun, mister, you'll say a ——uva lot more, before you're through!"

Mr. Lappett's eyes narrowed and he lifted his upper lip at the corners and showed his yellow teeth and thrust forward his large head, too large for his height and shoulders, and went on talking in his flat, high-pitched voice.

"Yes, captain, you're right. I'll say a ——uva lot more. Suppose I told you the *Medea* was never intended to reach port! What d'you say to that?"

"I'd say, mister, you were a —— liar! What's more I'd probably twist your mis'rable little neck with my own hands, you yellow-livered dope-smuggler!"

Mr. Lappett's nerve was shaken, bu his case was good; shock-proof, in fact;

he knew that Black John's bluff would hold as far as the show-down, and then the game was in his hands for keeps.

"Dope!" he said. "I ain't got no dope Where is it? You know. I don't. Talk's cheap. Mebbe I can talk, too."

"Mebbe, you can." Black John went to the door. "Mister, I've a mind to have some one else here with us two, just as witness. Mebbe you're goin' to say things you'll not like to have brought up against you afterward."

And again Mr. Lappett had to assure himself that his case was good. Yet when he heard Black John, standing at the open door, say, "Mr. MacGish, would you mind comin' up here a minute, please!" his courage returned; he could feel, indeed, a tinge of pity creep over him. MacGish! Lord! MacGish, of all men!

When the chief engineer was in the room and the door shut once more, Black John gave a curt nod.

"Now, then, Mr. Lappett, let's have it. Mr. MacGish, you'll be surprized to hear the mate's just been hintin' the *Medea's* goin' to be scuttled! Isn't that what you meant, mister?"

"It is, sir. That's what I mean. You an' Mr. MacGish are aimin' to scuttle the *Medea!*"

"The —— we are!" said MacGish. "Ma ——, Lappett, ye're eskin' fur trouble!"

Black John put out his hand.

"Wait, mister," he growled, "let him finish!"

"The *Medea* ain't meant to reach 'ome! Though where an' 'ow you intend to manage it, I ain't discovered. But you'll sink 'er, I know, just as easy as you got my suitcase! An' what's more, it won't do no good if you do kill me, or beat me, or try any rough stuff! You're stronger than me, I allow, either o' you, single-'anded, or both together! Well an' good! But you'll listen to what I'm tellin' you. An' why will you? Because you're too scared not to!"

Black John laughed grimly. The mate's boldness amazed him.

"Carry on, Lappett. What's it they say roun' here? I'm tickled to death to have the chance! I'm —— if I heard anythin' so comic since leavin' home! Carry on!"

"Well, then, you're not denyin' the *Medea* ain't goin' to reach 'ome! You can't. Grinton's in a bad way. He wants money. He's been spendin' like water the last year or two; I know for a fact. I got friends who've told me. The *Medea's* insured five, ten, fifteen times her present worth; he's kept the premiums paid up to the hilt. She won't pass her next survey. She'll be condemned. Grinton can't sell her, not even to the Greeks! All right, then, what's he to do?

"Mr. MacGish, next time you're talkin' confidential an' private in a public place, don't drink so much liquor you don't care who's list'nin'! I heard you say in Halifax this was yer last voyage in the *Medea!* That you'd have money enough to retire afterward on an' do as you liked!"

"Ye mees'rable little toad!" said MacGish. "What dae ye mean? Canna I tell a frien' I'm leavin' the sea wi'oot a long-eared jackass like you pittin' yin thing atop of anither an' makin' a theory that winna haud watter! Ye're daft!"

MacGish cast a quick side glance at Black John.

"Go on, Mr. Lappett," said he. "Mr. MacGish an' I are very interested."

"You may well be interested, too," said Lappett. "I know for a fact, captain, that as soon as you get home you're proposin' to send Mrs. Dorrock to Madeira or Teneriffe or Switzerland for 'er health!"

Ah, ha! That shot had got home, anyway. Captain Dorrock—old Black John Dorrock—had put one hand to his throat and with the other he was steadying himself against the wall. And had his face grown paler or was it only the reflection of the electric light on the quay shining through the port?

"You can't do that, captain, without money, can you? An' what's more, if you think all them things is just nothin' to amount to anythin'—if you're still pretendin' you don't know what in the world I'm talkin' about—how d'you account for the fake cargo we're carryin'?"

"What's that?"

Black John was surprized, at last.

"A fake cargo! It's askin' rather a lot to expect you to talk sense, Lappett, but try if you can!"

Lappett nodded.

"That got you, didn't it? I may be a fool, same as you said, but I ain't as big a fool as you make out! I've been havin'

a look in the holds night times. See! We're takin' boxes of machinery across the Atlantic that ain't machinery at all, but half of them, an' mebbe more than half, nothin' but bricks an' scrap iron! How d'you account for that, eh? What's the freight rates on a cargo of scrap iron rigged up to look like machinery or manufactured articles, eh? No, sir, that cargo's a dummy, meant never to reach England! An' the insurance, Captain Dorrock, will be paid on the goods marked on the bills of ladin'. Now, then, you answer me this! Why are we takin' old bricks an' scrap iron across the Western Ocean, eh? Who's fixed things this side? Answer me that! An' if you say it ain't true what I'm tellin' you, then I say you're wrong! I'm talkin' about what I seen. The *Medea* ain't meant to reach home!"

Black John smiled.

"Mister, mebbe you know more'n me!"

"I shouldn't say that, captain. I dunno how far we're goin', f'rinstance, to start with! I dunno if we'll be springin' a leak tomorrer afternoon within reach o' this side, or go ashore some fine night off the coast of Ireland, or what! Only I know this, this is the *Medea's* last voyage."

"Mr. Lappett," said Black John, "what if it is!"

"If it is," said Mr. Lappett startled, "I want my price. I ain't forgotten what you did to me in 'Alifax! I ain't likely to. You lost me money!"

"I pinched his cocaine," said Black John to the chief. "Got it away from the man he had fetchin' it aboard for him an' dumped it in the harbor!"

"Are you sure you dumped it?" said Mr. Lappett sharply.

"Pleasant little man, ain't he?" said Black John.

"Yes, I'm pleasant all right. How pleasant you ain't 'ad a chance o' findin' out yet! But you made me lose money. You acted pious an' good over that cocaine, didn't you! Just as if you hadn't done worse yerself before you got took bad with religion or whatever it is you 'ave got! But, religion or not, you ain't so far gone that you won't scuttle yer ship! See! We needn't waste time in arguin'! But, I tell you this, Captain Dorrock, you'll pay for the privilege! Or else, just as soon as we reach dry land again, I'll split on you!"

Black John felt all at once tired of the whole business. He wanted to be by himself. He wanted to think.

"Mr. Lappett," he said, "is there anything else you pertic'lerly wanted to tell me?"

"Anythin' else," said the mate, "nothin'! Except that I'm warnin' you that I want my price—half—fifty-fifty!"

The chief engineer gave a shout of laughter.

"Man, but ye're a comic!"

"From whom do you want your price, eh?" said Black John.

"You, o' course," said the mate. "You an' the chief!"

"So you think I'm goin' to scuttle my ship, do you! Now, you listen to me, mister, an' take my advice. I've just about had enough of you an' your crookedness to last. If I have any more, I'll—" He scowled. "Man, I could kill you! I tell you, mister, it might be cheaper in the end for both of us, if I did. I'm in no mood to go shilly-shallyin' about an' wastin' my breath arguin' with a rat like you!"

"I ain't scared," said the mate.

"No, but you will be. You will be." And then the last shreds of his patience left him. "Lappett, if you want to be safe: if you feel a hankerin' after a long life, get off this ship! See! Go sick! Anythin'. Now, clear out of the room, sharp!"

"I'll make the voyage with you, Captain Dorrock. I'm not like Hannigan. I got brains in my 'ead. See! I know 'ow to use 'em. You're up against somethin' tough when you're up against me!"

"All right!" said Black John. "Now, one last word. I'm tellin' you for your own good, you'd be wiser to stay in New York than sail with me! For, whatever you do or you don't do, I'm takin' the *Medea* home. Cargo or no cargo! An' neither you, nor Paul Grinton, nor the Western Ocean, nor the —— himself, will stop me! An' now get out, or I'll kick you out!"

When the door had closed on the mate Black John looked at the chief.

"Well, Mac!"

"Weel, John, dae ye mean it aboot the *Medea* gaun hame?"

"Mac," said Dorrock. "Mac."

It came over MacGish that Black John was aging. His face was old and tired. His eyes under the black bushy brows were the eyes of an old and disappointed man.

"Mac, I'm robbin' you of money you wanted. But, Mac, Grinton's robbed me of everything I had that made life worth livin'! He wouldn't advance me the money I needed, Mac; just a few pounds; nothin' to him, Mac: he turned me down; an' now it's too late! Do you understand, Mac? It's too late! The *Medea's* goin' to reach home!"

"I dinna unnerstaun', John; nae. But if ye tak' the *Medea* hame—an' I'm no' sayin' ye're no' richt, mind!—if ye tak' the *Medea* hame, ye ken fine that Grinton wull be a ruined man!"

"Aye. He'll be ruined."

Black John held out the cable.

"Read this, Mac. I had it this afternoon."

The chief engineer read the message and clicked his tongue.

"Man," he said, "I'm mair sorry nor I can fin' worruds to say. An' Grinton wudna advance ye the money!"

"So that I could send Maggie away to a warm climate! Her one hope, Mac!"

"Did ye tell him what fur ye wantit the money, John?"

"I told him."

"I'm wi' ye, John, whatever ye say!"

There was another knock at the door.

Flotter, the steward, entered.

"Tea's ready, sir!"

X

THE *Medea*, rolling heavily, fought her way eastward through great green seas, under a sky dark with gray storm clouds. The day was bitterly cold; the howling of the wind rose spitefully in the squalls; from time to time fierce scurries of snow would come scudding down from the northwest with masses of icy foam, torn from the white crests of the waves.

On the poop Jimmy Kerrill, Radby, the younger of the two apprentices, and two of the deck-hands, had been tightening the relieving-tackle on the quadrant.

"That'll do!" said Jimmy.

He turned and looked at the patent log, whistled and then hurried forward, clinging on to the life-lines rigged across the after well-deck, as a big sea came swirling over the weather bulwarks.

In front of him was Garle, the little white-faced deck-hand, whose reputation for sobriety and good behavior had suffered as the result of a wild burst of drunkenness and two days' absence without leave in New York.

"How d'you like it, eh, Garle?" said Jimmy.

"Bad, sir," said Garle, over his shoulder. "How long's it goin' to last, eh? Don't like it at all, sir!"

The little pink-eyed man in the big sou'-wester and yellow oilskins looked so forlorn that Jimmy, not as a rule given to sentiment or compassion, all of a sudden pitied him. Another misfit! A seaman, because he was incapable of earning a living ashore; inefficient, weak, frightened, trying to do a man's work and failing.

"Make haste!" he said.

A sea filled the well-deck.

Garle slipped as he reached the ladder, and fell. The roll of the ship and the rush of water washed him against the drum of the steering-gear.

Jimmy clutched at his arm and dragged him into the narrow recess under the bridge-deck, off which there were doors leading to the engine-room gratings and the flooded rooms of the carpenter, boatswain and donkeyman.

"Hurt?" said Jimmy.

"Coo!" said Garle. "Winded, sir! That's all, sir!"

"Pull yourself together, then! Next thing you'll be over the side!"

"No great odds if I am, sir," said the deck-hand. "A week of this weather, sir, is enough for any one."

"Scared?" asked Jimmy.

"Me, sir! Yes. I'm tryin' to make my peace with God, sir, before the end comes!"

"Peace with how much?" said Jimmy.

He stared at the little man's peaked face in amazement. Deck-hands who talked of making their peace with God were new to him.

"I'm a sinner, sir. I thought, sir, I'd conquered Satan! I was wrong. He got the better of me in New York, sir. I fell. I was drunk, sir, for two days. It's always been that, sir. I was meant for the church, sir—the ministry! I was a divinity student, sir, but I couldn't keep clear of the drink!"

Jimmy was staggered by the little man's earnestness. He felt embarrassed and confused.

"How do you mean 'before the end comes'?"

"Sir, when we were lying in New York, there were men for'ard who saw the rats leaving the ship, hundreds of them!"

"Don't believe it!" said Jimmy. "That's rubbish! Come on, we'd better be moving!"

On the bridge-deck Sandy Racken peered out of the alleyway that led to his room and the engine-room.

"Hullo, Jimmy, how's the glass?"

"Falling, still. Pretty bad, isn't it?"

"Bad!" Sandy laughed. "Jimmy, you ought to stand a watch below! I swear you'd think the rollin' of this old hooker 'ud shake the engines off their bed-plate!"

"Having a rough time, then, eh?"

"Man! if that scrap iron holds together till we reach the Drain, I'll be surprized! Aye, an' thankful!"

"Well! we've all got our troubles, haven't we? Seen any rats since we left New York, Sandy?"

"Not that I know of! What are you askin' that for?"

"One of the deck-hands says the *Medea's* done for, because they saw the rats crawling ashore in New York!"

And then Jimmy and Sandy Racken laughed as they hung on to the rail.

"Funny ——, aren't they?" said Jimmy.

"If there are no rats aboard the *Medea*, it's on account of the fumigatin' in New York an' for no other reason! You're not superstitious, Jimmy, are you?"

"Lord, no! Well, I'm off! Be good!"

"Goin' to turn in?"

"No. It's my watch on deck. The mate's been on the bridge since breakfast. He says he can't sleep with this going on and I don't blame him! Who won the war, Sandy?"

"Lappett, o' course. So long, Jimmy!"

As Jimmy reached the lower bridge-ladder, Flotter, the steward, looked out of the alleyway, preparing to make a dash aft to the galley.

"Is it gettin' worse, mister?" he asked.

"Dunno," said Jimmy. "Seen any rats this trip, Flotter?"

"Me!" said the steward. He chuckled feebly. "No, mister, ain't had a drop since leavin' New York. This rollin' always goes to my 'ead; only when the ship rolls to starboard, my 'ead rolls to port—it's 'orrible!"

But, rats; no, he had seen no rats! Never a one! Not even in the store! What did Mr. Kerrill want to know for? It wasn't the time to be playin' the fool now——

Jimmy laughed and went up to the flying bridge where he stood near Mr. Lappett and clung to the rail and peered over the dodger. A sailor himself, the ways of sailors always amused him. Garle's talk of the rats leaving the ship struck him as highly comic. Garle, poor little ——, was the kind of man who would believe what was told him, implicitly. He laughed again.

The mate turned and glanced at him. He looked sick and listless; his yellow face was drawn and old; his eyes were bloodshot.

"It's bad," he said.

"S'pose so," said Jimmy. "Bad enough, anyway."

Bad enough! And likely to remain bad. He knew. No need to ask whether the glass rose or fell! With such a wind, tearing down from the northwest, from Labrador and Greenland, the sea had not yet reached its highest point of fury. And yet the old *Medea* had lived through worse weather than this. And what else could any sailorman look for in Winter in the North Atlantic than what he saw from the *Medea's* bridge; the vast stretch of tumbled waters, tossed and tormented by the gale; flung up high into vast hills, topped with white foam, curling over and crashing down the long, downward slopes, veined like marble, boiling and swirling, and then piling up once more into ranges of hills up which the *Medea* pounded slowly, rolling and fighting and struggling like a living creature, in the grip of Destiny, until the crest of the hill was reached and once more the descent began into the depths! And overhead the sky grew darker; and the clouds were moving more quickly; and the snow flakes were larger.

Jimmy leaned toward the mate.

"I hear some of the hands are saying the rats were seen leaving the ship in New York, and the ship won't reach home!" He chuckled. "Funny, eh!"

The mate nodded.

"They're right. She won't."

The thin lips were twisted into a sneer and he looked at Jimmy with contempt and a strange bitterness in his expression.

"Won't what?" said Jimmy, puzzled by his answer.

"The *Medea* won't reach 'ome! I know she won't."

Jimmy turned once more and gazed over the waters.

Crazy, of course. Lappett was crazy. What was the use of trying to argue or talk with a man like that?

A shower of ice-cold spray flung up over the bridge-deck came clattering back at them. He ducked and straightened up again with his eyes smarting with salt.

And then he heard Lappett talking in his whining, querulous voice.

"You don't know everythin', mister! You go through life with your eyes shut, just like they're shut now! You want to wake up an' see what's 'appenin'! You're simple. Soft, I call it. Suppose you think all men are honest an' all women are angels, eh!"

"Mr. Lappett, I believe you're cracked!"

"Am I?" said Lappett with his little laugh. "Mebbe I am! Who wouldn't be? On a packet like this!" He shivered. "——, it's cold."

AND then Black John Dorrock came out of the chart-room and stood between the mate and the second mate, clinging on to the rail, swaying as the *Medea* rolled and gazing eastward over the tumbling waste of waters. And he, too, so Jimmy thought, had changed. At a glance, his weatherworn face, set in a grim and almost savage frown, with the lines cut deep from his nostrils to the corners of his straight-lipped mouth, had not altered. Yet there showed in the gray, keen-sighted eyes, under the black eyebrows, a weariness that was new, as if something that was vital had gone from him.

He inclined his head toward the mate.

"Scuttle the ship, eh, mister!" he said in a low voice. "When we do, mister, when we do, how'd you like to go with it, eh?"

Jimmy Kerrill heard what Black John said. He could not hear the mate's reply. His profile, the little hooked nose, the tight mouth, the small chin, gave no clue to what his thoughts might be.

Presently Black John relaxed his features and laughed.

The mate shivered.

"I'm bidin' my time," he said. "I'm bidin' my time. I've a debt to settle, an account to square." His voice died away to a dull muttering. "It ain't my watch," he said. "But I can't sleep."

Black John moved over to where Jimmy Kerrill was standing.

"Ever seen a man so mad with hate he dunno what he's doin'? That's Lappett! Watch him! If he wasn't yeller through an' through, if he'd had the guts of a dago stevedore, I'd have had a knife in my liver by now. But not him!"

Jimmy, not knowing what he was expected to say, said nothing.

"What do you think of this?" said Black John, after a while.

"Seen worse," said Jimmy.

"Have you, by ——!" Black John snapped back. "Well, mister, that's fortunate, ain't it! I dunno how much worse you have seen, but you're still alive, ain't you! This time tomorrow, you'll be tellin' me you've had a new experience. Because, mister, you'll have seen a tol'rably bad Western Ocean gale. An' why that? Because, mister, though I've seen the glass a lot lower once, in the China Sea, I've never seen it as low as it is now, out here, in the North Atlantic! You know what that means as well as me!"

A wilder squall than any that had yet passed over came shrieking out of the northwest with a flurry of snow. The *Medea* rolled to port and a heavy sea crashed over the quarter and smashed high up over the funnel and the No. 3 hatch and the bridge.

More slowly the ship heeled back to starboard.

"If it gets much worse," said Black John, "we'll bring her head on." He frowned. "Better now than too late. Looks like it's goin' to tear the —— funnel out of her!"

He turned to Jimmy, his gray eyes puckered under his black brows, almost as if he doubted his own judgment.

"We might be wiser, eh mister, if we brought her round now! What d'you think?"

Jimmy nodded. But this, more than anything, showed him that the old man was not himself. For when before had Black John taken any one into his confidence or hinted even that he was uncertain what next he should do?

It meant, of course, that things were worse than he had imagined! If so——

There came a sudden wild *clang, clang, clang* from the telegraph and the pointer swung round to STOP.

Black John seized the handle and answered the engine-room's signal and swore.

The *Medea* rolled slowly over to port, over further still, and shook and quivered from stem to stern as a huge sea thundered on to the iron deck-plates.

Black John was shouting down the speaking tube to the engine room.

"Chief there? —— this tube! Can't hear you! Yes—yes, chief—yes——"

Sluggishly, as if fighting against a force too powerful to be resisted, the *Medea* righted herself and rolled to starboard.

Jimmy Kerrill saw that Black John's face was gray under the tan.

"Mister!" He yelled at him. "Mister, we're in for it! The pinchin'-pin in the I. P. eccentric pulley slackened back an' came out!"

"My ——!" said the mate. "My ——!" He pointed. "An' she's swingin'! My ——! We'll be broached to in a minute! The 'atches will go—we're done——"

The man had the look of one whose senses have left him.

"Yah!" Black John shook himself. "What's wrong with you, eh?" The old fighting grin had come back. "What's got you?"

"What are we goin' to do?" Lappett quavered.

"Fight!" Black John shouted. He grabbed the mate by the arm. "Mister, stir yourself! Get all hands on deck! Set the after stay-sail an' try sail! Away aft with you, hard as you can! Take all the hands that you need! Mr. Kerrill, go for'ard to the forepeak, with the carpenter an' a couple o' men—broach some o' those oil barrels! Try if you can break them waves! Get busy!"

As Jimmy clattered down the bridge-ladder, he heard Black John's bull voice raised in a roar of anger.

"No sails, you say! Tarpaulins, then! —— it, Lappett, wake up!"

Jimmy grinned. Lappett was scared.

A couple of men were clinging to the rail of the lower bridge, in the lee of the captain's room.

"Here you!" he shouted. "I want you for'ard! Where's Chips? Go fetch him!"

At the ladder leading to the forward well-deck he paused.

The *Medea* was lifted high up on what seemed the crest of a mountain. On either side, port and starboard, steep slopes of green, veined with white, stretched down into broad valleys. A moment's hesitation, and then, heeling over to starboard, the ship slid sideways—this was the sensation—down and down.

Jimmy ran forward, followed by Chayke, one of the apprentices, and the two deck-hands.

The carpenter, a little man with a huge gray mustache, came after them along the deck, clumsy in his oilskins and sea-boots, slipping and grabbing for safety at the winches and ring-bolts on the hatch-coamings and the steam-pipe casings.

The *Medea* rolled in the trough of the great seas; before the next wave could smash down on her, she rose slowly and deliberately, and slid once more, after the same sickening moment of hesitation.

As she reached the hollow, a sea, bigger than any she had yet weathered, bore down on the *Medea's* beam.

"Chips," Jimmy began, "that oil in the forepeak——"

He stopped, too thrilled to feel the nearness of death and yet unable to continue.

The mountain of water towered high above the *Medea*. They watched in silence, clinging on at the break of the forecastle, and then the overhanging foam seemed to launch itself from the top of the green slope and fall with a crash of thunder on the deck.

Neck-deep, the men struggled grimly against the fierce rush of water that threatened to take them over the lee bulwarks. For a moment all hope of existence went. Nothing could be seen, above the swelter of raging foam on the well-deck, but the funnel and the bridge and the masts, rolling over to starboard.

And then, gradually, the *Medea* once more righted herself, throwing the tons of water over her bulwarks and through the wash ports, and once more Jimmy Kerrill, alive still and hopeful, laughed queerly, as they were lifted high up on the crest of a wave and he saw the long green rollers racing down on their beam from the black northwest.

"Now, then!" he said. His feeling of inertia, listlessness, had gone. Fight! Yes, they must fight, as Black John had said. "Chips, let's get at that oil!"

"Port life-boat's gone!" said Chayke, the apprentice. "Golly, what a sea!"

"Us next!" said one of the deck-hands.

"Don't be a —— fool!" said Jimmy.

THEY were crowded into the alleyway between the firemen's and the sailors' forecastles, lifting the first of the barrels of thick crude oil from the forepeak by a handy billy and tackle, when Garle arrived from the forward well-deck.

"Sir," he said, in a scared voice, "sir—Mr. Kerrill, the captain says will you come aft at once and get the sails set, and you're to make haste, please!"

Puzzled, Jimmy gave a few hasty directions to the carpenter.

"You know what to do, Chips, don't you! Get the barrel broached as quick as you can; let the oil drip steady, not too fast, down the weather closet pipe: pack it with oakum—anything!"

He turned and made his way out of the alleyway, shouting that he would be back as soon as he could.

He wondered as he ran along the well-deck, chosing his time as the vessel rolled, whether the sails had been discovered; one set, at least, he had seen the voyage before, used as separation cloths in one of the holds. It was no one's business, of course, what became of the sails that even an old tramp like the *Medea* was bound to carry! How often in a man's sea life would he see them used? Sails! Jimmy laughed grimly as he saw Garle, ahead of him, swept off his feet once again and go sliding into the scuppers. Poor ——! Clumsy, as usual!

The man grinned at him sheepishly.

"Buck up, Garle!" said Jimmy. "Buck up!"

At the rail overlooking the after well-deck and the No. 4 and 5 hatches and the mainmast around which men, hampered by their oilskins, struggled with the canvas, waist-deep in water, he found the mate.

"Mister," he said when he saw Jimmy. "Mister!"

His eyes were flecked with blood; his face was like a Chinese image.

"What the ——'s wrong with you?" Jimmy yelled.

"Get them —— sails set, an' don't you talk to me like that! See them makin' a hash of it. Lubbers! No —— use, none o' them!"

Lappett had collapsed. The man's innate cowardice had mastered him, at last. He hated the sea at heart, and always had. The noise of the gale, the booming of the wind, the look of the huge seas, the daytime darkness, the fierce motion of the ship, the clattering and banging, the approach of death, death and the unknown, had robbed him of his self-control, had made him incapable of command, of exercising authority, yet the pretense remained. He clung to the rail, as helpless as a sea-sick passenger, overcome with nausea, vomiting, muttering that the hands, the boatswain more so than any, were useless.

"No good," he said. "No good, by ——!"

Jimmy, appalled by Lappett's collapse, half-fell, half-slid down the ladder.

A green sea surged over the bulwarks.

One of the deck hands, Cudden, a Londoner, was swept overboard, shrieking, struggling vainly to grasp the wire rigging of the mainmast as he was carried out to sea.

The derricks of the No. 5 winch had broken free from their lashings and began to swing.

A man waded through the water in the well-deck toward the ladder, clinging to a life-line.

"All up!" he whimpered. "All up! What's the use?"

Jimmy had always disliked the man, a whining, miserable little wretch, Larch, by name, from Cardiff.

He grabbed his arm, twisted him about and shoved him with all his force toward the mainmast.

The big derricks swung overhead.

"Larch!" Jimmy yelled. "Larch, what the —— are you doing? Get back at once!"

First Lappett, then Larch! Who next?

Jimmy, Cudden's death-shriek echoing in his ears still, plunged forward. The hands were wavering. The infection of panic had touched them. Cowardice breeds cowardice, or if not cowardice, fear.

"Get those —— derricks fast!" he shouted. "Don't be scared of 'em! Grab that rope, one of you—throw a clove hitch over the —— derrick, you —— my ——! jump, can't you!"

Long before the derricks were secured and the blocks hooked into the eyes of the mainstays and the sails bent and hoisted, Jimmy Kerrill was worn out, mentally and physically; he had worked hard; he had put courage, if not hope, into the hearts of the men, at the expense, it seemed, of his own vitality.

Only the boatswain of all the sailors had had practical experience of sail; the master, or even the ordinary seaman, of an old-time

clipper ship, would have laughed or cried, according to his mood or temper, even perhaps pitied, had he seen the *Medea*, staggering under the seas that battered her; while the frozen, tired men on the after well-deck, struggled to lash the plunging derricks and then to hoist the heavy, flapping canvas sails, risking death each time the vessel rolled her bulwarks under, yet knowing that to die fighting is better than to die waiting idly for the end.

Slowly the thick oil from the forecastle spread over the surface of the sea; and although the fierce, agonizing roll of the *Medea* never ceased, although each roll might be the last, although the terrifying rise and fall of the seas sweeping down from the northwest continued, nevertheless, the miracle had happened, the waves no longer crashed down on to the *Medea's* decks; the oil had conquered and the hatches were safe.

And at last the sails were set and the *Medea's* bow was brought into the wind.

"That'll do now!" Jimmy shouted. "Clear out o' this!" And, —— he was cold!

Drenched to the skin, too dispirited to do more than scramble for such safety as the bridge deck afforded them, the deck hands straggled past him, up the ladder.

Once again as he hurried toward the bridge in a blinding snow-storm, Jimmy Kerrill heard Garle's voice.

"Well, what is it now?"

ALL at once, his impatience gave way to pity. Garle, the ex-divinity student, was no real good as a seaman; he was a failure in every way, yet would Garle have chosen the sea for a career any more than himself, had he been able to choose? Was he happy? Moreover, if within the next half-hour, he and Garle were to be drowned, who would be the better man?

And somehow the reasoning, such as it was, brought a smile to his salt-cracked lips.

"Sir," said Garle, "are we going, do you think?"

"Can't tell," said Jimmy. "Don't expect so. Why?"

"There's a girl at home, sir. If I get back—I'd like to marry her and put things right."

"Good Lord!" Jimmy, half-way up the lower bridge-ladder, looked down at the thin, white face of the deck-hand and a curious wonder stole over him. And again he felt the same thrill of pity. Poor little ——!

"Mr. Kerrill!" Black John shouted at him from the upper bridge. "Go down to the engine-room an' ask the chief how he's makin' out!"

Jimmy went back along the bridge-deck, limping; he had fallen when lashing the derricks, and his knee had begun to swell.

The *Medea*, he noticed, had settled by the stern. He felt no surprize. The sullen heaving of the oil-filmed waves that could not break, further off the fierce ridges of white foam, that in some weird, fantastic way suggested to his mind a nightmare of rolling green hills topped with hedges of white May at home in England, and the dark clouds racing across the sky, filled him with a sudden sense of his own littleness.

The mate's yellow face gazed at him from the alleyway that led to the engineers' rooms.

"Mister," he said, "you done that well, settin' them sails. I was watchin' you."

"What the —— are you hiding here for?" Jimmy asked. "Why don't you go back to the bridge?"

"It ain't my watch, mister, it's yours," Lappett mumbled. "I'm a sick man. I'm —— sick. Mister, did you see Cudden go overboard? Did you?"

Jimmy, too angry to answer, pushed past him into the alleyway and entered the door leading to the engine-room.

He clambered down the slippery steel ladders that swung to and fro with the rolling of the ship, past the silent engines, to the platform awash with oil and seawater.

"Where's the chief?"

"In the stoke-hole."

A bareheaded, red-eyed man came from between the boilers into the engine-room.

"What dae ye want here?"

Under the smear of grease and sweat and coal-dust, Jimmy recognized MacGish.

"Chief, the captain sent me."

The chief grabbed at Jimmy's arm, and they slid with the roll of the ship against the pillar of the telegraph.

"Listen," said the chief, "we've jist gotten the eccentric rod doon an' into the stoke hol' —bent like a bow—the pinchin'-pin was wedged between the eccentric pulley an' the go-aheid strap. Ye winna ken what I'm tellin' ye, but that's what it is! Tell John Dorrock we're daein' oor best fur him as weel as oorsel's!"

"How long will it be, chief, before the job's finished?"

"A lang time yet. The rod wull be heatit rid hot in yin o' the furnaces, d'ye unnerstaun'? An' then we'll straichten it oot! If we dinna a' gang to glory in the meantime, Jimmy, we'll dae it, but I wudna like to gi'e a guess at the time it wull tak' wi' this —— rollin'!"

Bad as conditions were on deck, Jimmy Kerrill was glad to be out in the fresh air, away from the stifled, coffined feeling of the engine-room.

Black John Dorrock had been right. The sea was rising even higher.

The mate was back on the bridge. Some of the men had taken refuge in the wheelhouse.

No one had much to say. The booming of the gale made speech difficult. The galley had been washed out early in the morning; there was no food but biscuits; there would be coffee later in the day, with any luck.

The rolling of the ship grew worse as time went on. It seemed as if she would roll right over.

The deck-hands had given up hope; whether the engineers made good the damage or not, the ship was lost.

Black John Dorrock, his face inscrutable, apparently unmoved by the desolation of the waters and the fury of the wind, came across to where the mate was clinging, motionless, despondent and sick.

"If those sails last, mister, an' —— knows how old they are! we'll weather it. If not—*click!*" He grinned. "An' then, mister, you'll have the satisfaction when ye're goin' to Davey Jones, o' knowin' you were right an' that the *Medea* didn't finish her voyage."

The mate's thin lips twisted into a snarl, but he uttered no sound.

"Afraid, ain't you?" said Black John. "Well, mister, you need be."

No tramp steamer that ever sailed the Western Ocean in Wintertime could have been more badly found than the *Medea*. Forward the supply of oil was running short. Chayke brought word to the bridge that very soon there would be none left.

Jimmy Kerrill was sent down into the engine-room once more.

He found the chief engineer and the second, in the battened down stoke-hold, swinging great Monday hammers, beating at the eccentric rod, glowing red hot in the darkness, resting on two V-shaped blocks of hardwood.

And as the floor of the stoke-hold tilted to and fro with the roll of the ship and men went sliding from side to side, with slices and shovels and rakes and coal and salt-water, in order that the two engineers hammering might keep their feet, other men lay full length on their bellies and held their ankles.

"Stop!" said MacGish. "Here, yin o' ye—tak' this hammer." He panted for breath. "We're straicht'nin' it oot, Jimmy," he said. "We'll dae it yet."

The third engineer had taken the hammer. Jimmy and MacGish stood to one side, talking.

"Hoo are things gaun on deck?" said MacGish.

"Not too bad, considering."

"The deck-haun's gi'in' ye ony trouble?"

"No," said Jimmy. "Not a bit."

"A-weel, ye're lucky!"

By which Jimmy gathered that in the stoke-hold MacGish had had more to do than merely straighten the eccentric rod.

He climbed to the bridge once more.

One of the sailors raised a sudden shout.

"Look! See it! Smoke!"

Against the gray sky the dark smoke of a steamer showed faintly.

"Big one, too!" said another of the men.

They waited, whispering, watching Black John, who gave no sign that he had even seen the approach of the ship that would rescue them.

It was the man who had first seen the smudge of smoke who said aloud what was in their thoughts.

"They'll send boats for us, if we ask 'em, won't they?" He laughed. "——!"

"Ours wouldn't last two minutes in this sea, Joe, what's left of 'em!"

"They'll see us—they see us already, I bet."

"They'll wireless us, won't they? What about a bally S. O. S., eh? ——, we need it!"

The mate was leaning over the rail, staring intently through the binoculars, held in shaking hands.

"That's a liner, sir. Four funnels."

Black John did not speak. His silence, the aloofness of his manner, fretted the nerves of the seamen.

"They've seen us," said the mate. "They've changed their course."

THERE was something majestic in the way the big steamer with her four great red and black funnels and her white bridge and upper works smashed through the gale, rolling and shipping great seas over her bows, yet giving the men on board the *Medea* an impression of an irresistible power and strength.

Minutes passed.

Some one yelled a warning.

A mass of water swept over the *Medea's* forecastle head, crashed against the break of the bridge-deck and the saloon and the lower and upper bridge, and tore aft, wrenching the last of the boats from the davits.

The *Medea* rose slowly, so slowly that for a few breathless moments of agony the men clinging to the bridge felt that the end had come.

"That settles it," said a deck-hand. "They'll take us off, fellers. That's the *Laronia*, ain't it!"

The mate read the signal that the liner had hoisted.

"C. S. Do you require any assistance?"

"I should say we does!"

"Assistance! ——!"

Through the driving snow the flags at the mast-head were visible to the eyes of the men waiting.

Radby, the apprentice, came up the bridge-ladder.

"I think, sir," he said breathlessly, "I think the try-sail's carrying away."

Black John roused himself.

"Mister," he said, looking at the mate and paying no attention to Radby, "we require no assistance! Hoist the answering pennant over D."

Lappett turned and gazed at Black John with slack mouth and protruding eyes.

"What's he say?"

A groan of despair burst from the deck-hands.

Black John cast a quick glance at the men, then spoke to the mate once more.

"You heard, mister. Are you goin' to get them flags hoisted, or not?"

The mate shivered.

"But they'll send a life-boat for us an' take us off," he said. "We can't make it, sir. We're down by the stern . . . all boats smashed—we're sinkin'! Surely to ——, sir, you want to abandon the ship! Why——"

Black John yelled at him, as the port wing of the bridge swung up.

"Get them —— flags h'isted, or by James, I'll have you locked in your room! Will you take my order, or won't you?"

"Very good, sir!"

The mate was beaten.

Across the open space of raging sea, the *Laronia* had hove to and with black smoke pouring from the four great funnels lay waiting an answer, rising and falling as the ridges of water came charging down on her, rolling slowly, steadily, and yet, almost it seemed to the deck-hands of the *Medea*, impatiently, as if the feelings of the captain and his officers on the bridge, gazing at them through their glasses, wondering whether one of their life-boats would be asked to make the journey across to rescue them, had been communicated to the ship herself.

Hannigan, the red-haired deck-hand, his face still scarred, uttered a hard laugh.

"Blast 'em!" he said. "Look, fellers! There's passengers, moldy passengers, there, watchin' us, an' waitin' for the bugle to blow for their next meal, an' us poor beggars 'ere ——"

He broke off with an angry howl as the boatswain hauled at the halyards and the answering pennant and the flag D were hoisted to the signal yard on the foremast. "An' they'll leave us! By ——, they'll leave us!"

"It ain't right! No, nor it ain't fair!"

"It's —— murder!"

Black John might not have heard them for all the notice he took.

The mate wrenched at his shoulder.

"Captain!" he yelled. "Captain, don't you understand—you ain't surely goin' to let them leave us—it's 'opeless! We're broken down—we're broachin' to again—the oil's run out—the sails are splittin'——"

"Mr. Lappett, will you mind your own business!"

"——!" said the mate faintly.

And then Hannigan, blazing with anger, pulled the mate aside and shook his fist at Black John.

"You!" he said. "Who the —— do you think you are!"

The *Medea* lurched and a sea came sweeping over the group on the flying bridge.

"We can't weather it! Ain't you seaman enough to know that? What in ——'s the use of stayin' here? We got wives an' children we want to get home to, if you ain't! It ain't possible to live out a gale like this—not us—we're sinkin'! This old packet can't last, not the shape she's in; she's leakin'. We got a right to be taken off a sinkin' ship, that's law. They've asked us——"

The deep, snarling voice choked in a sudden growl.

Black John, like every one else on the bridge, holding on with one hand, held in the other a revolver.

"Stand back!" he said. "Or I'll shoot! That's enough! Stop it! Any more of your —— insolence, Hannigan, an' I'll kill you! Give orders to me, would you! I'm tryin' to place you, Hannigan: I've had all the trouble with you I want: I've had trouble with you before somewhere else! Get off the bridge!"

He addressed the remainder of the deckhands.

"Any more of you like to argue the point?"

He moved the muzzle of his revolver from side to side, scowling and showing his teeth.

The *Medea* rolled far over to port. The *Laronia* blew her whistle, and once more she was under weigh. A scurry of snow came down from the northwest and blotted her out from view.

Black John, revolver in hand still, smiled.

Jimmy Kerrill, dazed and bewildered, wondered at his confidence in himself and his ship.

The mate leaned over the rail of the bridge, his face gray, his knees sagging, his mouth working as if he were chewing.

"Are you all right, mister?" Jimmy asked him.

"We're done for!" he mumbled. "Done for ——

He swore savagely and glared at Black John.

"An' all because o' you, you——"

Black John was watching him.

"Well, Mr. Lappett—well!"

"You've as good as murdered us!" said Lappett.

"You, mister: I hope so. Better now than later. As well now as on dry land, eh!" He spoke to Jimmy. "Mr. Kerrill, go aft an' see how those sails are lastin'."

IN THE engine-room the eccentric rod was in its place at last.

"Thenk God fur that!" said the chief.

He rang the telegraph to STAND BY.

The telegraph from the bridge answered HALF-SPEED AHEAD.

"A' richt, Mr. Racken!" said the chief. "Let her gang!"

JIMMY KERRILL met the wireless operator in the alleyway that led to his room.

"Hullo, Sparks, how are you?"

"All right, I suppose, Mr. Kerrill. Lord!" He gave a weak little laugh. "If I'd known it was like this, maybe I wouldn't have been so keen on coming to sea! It's ——, isn't it!"

"Don't like it, eh?"

"Like it!" He shook his head. "It was my cousin persuaded me, Mr. Kerrill. He's in the same job. Said it was cushy. I'm not blaming him, of course. Where do you think he is? He's only just left us, an hour ago! The *Laronia's* his ship!"

"Wireless operator?"

"One of 'em. I was talking to him. I suppose he thought they were going to take us off! Funny meeting him, wasn't it?"

THE chief engineer found Black John in the chart room.

"Hullo, Mac! Good work! I knew you'd do it!"

"Aye, I'd dae it, if the auld packet floatit!"

The two men stared at each other without speaking. Then the chief engineer continued:

"Weel, it was touch an' go, eh! John, I thocht mair nor yince I'd see the sea floodin' the engine-room. But what's this aboot the *Laronia* comin' up an offerin' to tak' us aff!"

"Didn't you know at the time?" Black John asked.

"Doon below, John, we didna ken onythin' fur quite a whiles but thon eccentric rod! An' sae ye missed a chance o' bein' ta'en aboard the *Laronia!*"

"Sorry?"

"Nae. What fur shud I be sorry? But if ye'd wantit to sink the *Medea*, John, ye cud ha'e dune it then, easy!"

"Grinton will be sick," said Black John. "Mac, would you care for a drink?"

"Aye," said MacGish. "I wud."

XI

BLACK JOHN DORROCK gazed into the blackness ahead and waited, savagely impatient, for daybreak. Though no sign of dawn was visible in the east, no lifting of the gloom, the long night was drawing to an end, and he was thankful.

He felt years older, less able to bear the strain and very weary. He wanted, more than he wanted anything in the world, save Grinton's ruin, rest and freedom from care. Peace he would never have. That, he knew, was impossible.

In the four days that had passed since the *Laronia* had been sighted the weather had steadily moderated; it seemed as if the gale had blown itself out. But now once more there was reason to be anxious. Since midnight the glass had fallen; the wind was rising, howling and snarling through the funnel-stays; great seas came crashing on to the port quarter; and the *Medea*, overburdened, down by the stern, rolled pitilessly.

Black John glanced at the mate; a square, thick-set figure in his oil skins, leaning motionless over the rail, swaying to the motion of the ship. Since four o'clock when he had come on watch he had not spoken. His face, seen occasionally in the light of the binnacle looked like the face of dead man; with dark shadows under the pale eyes and hollows under the cheek-bones and the yellow skin tight over the bridge of his hooked nose and teeth and chin.

"Mr. Lappett!" Black John called to him.

"Sir," he said, and he slid along the bridge to where he stood.

"Blowin' up worse!"

"Yah!" Lappett snarled. "You're sorry now you let the *Laronia* go, ain't yer! So you oughter be. D'you know what the hands call yer? A murderer!"

Black John grinned.

"I know that, mister. There's —— little I don't know of what goes on aboard this ship. See!"

"You're threatenin' me!" said Mr. Lappett.

Black John nodded.

"Mister," he said, "you make me laugh."

Even now the mate's wild anger, his bitterness and hate, seemed merely foolish.

"We won't reach the Bristol Channel!" said the mate. "How can we? The old hooker's leakin' in every rivet! You know as well as me! Ask the chief whether the pumps are 'oldin' their own or not!" Spray swept over them, and he spat viciously. "I tell yer, we're sinkin', that's what we're doin'—sinkin'!"

"Shouldn't be surprized, mister," said Black John. "Lookin' at you, Lappett, the wonder is why it worries you. You're no use to yourself nor no one else. Mister, I know more about you than you ever thought, an' I admire your courage. Yes, mister, I admire your courage. Some say you're no more'n a —— coward. I know better. If I had your sins on my soul, I'd die of fright."

He nodded and went to the chart-room.

He was pouring himself a glass of rum, his back to the door, when he heard above the booming of the wind, and the crash of the sea, and the creaking of the ship, a soft wheezing. He wheeled swiftly and saw that the mate had followed him.

"Get out, Mr. Lappett!" he said. He was proud to notice that his hand was not shaking as he continued to pour the rum into the glass. "Get back to the bridge at once!"

"Drinkin' again! Soakin'. That's what you are, Black John Dorrock, a soaker! I've had all I want. See! You're drivin' me mad. I can't stand it—I can't—I can't, —— you! What did you do with that dope you pinched? Where did you hide it? I want it, —— you! Did you sell it in New York, you mangey cur? Or is it aboard the ship?"

Lappett was like a man in a fit. His eyes were wild. He grinned and showed his teeth. He slavered. He crooked his hands.

"Opium!" said Black John suddenly. "That's what it is! Lappett, stay where you are! I dumped that poison into Halifax Harbor. I told you, didn't I? I know what's wrong with you, of course. You've knocked off the dope too sudden, an' it's gnawin' you!"

"You're a murderer!" said Lappett fiercely. "A murderer! An' a liar! I'll get even with you, Dorrock. You've been tellin' people I've been tryin' to steal yer job from you! I 'ave! An' I'll 'ave it, too! I'll 'ave it! An' you, as well!"

Black John threw the rum into his eyes and shot out an arm and grabbed his wrist and pulled hard. A two-edged knife clattered to the chart-room floor. Without speaking, he smacked Lappett twice, on the cheek, with the palm of his hand.

Then he released his grip.

Lappett stared at him for a moment, his face quivering. A sudden roll of the ship sent him sliding into a corner, where he collapsed in a heap, weeping like a woman.

"I'm done—you're hard—too hard! If I get 'ome—if I get 'ome, Dorrock—I'll 'ave no mercy!"

He rose to his feet.

"Gimme a drink!" he said. "For God's sake, gimme a drink!"

Black John poured himself out some more of the rum and drank, watching Lappett the while; then he half-filled the glass once more, replaced the bottle in the locker and turned the key.

"You don't deserve it!" he said. "But, drink, if you got to. 'Pon my Sam, Lappett! if you'd ha' stuck me, same as you intended, I'd ha' felt there was some chance for you. But there ain't. You're done for, broke, finished! Get me! Drink up an' get back to the bridge; that is, if you can face it! Can you?"

Without caring whether the mate answered him or not, he pulled open the chart-room door and, bending his head to the gale, stepped out into the darkness.

Later he detected the first faint sign of day, pale yellow on the horizon. His impatience grew. In daylight, there was hope; in the darkness, none. Gradually the sky lightened; the great seas that came following after the *Medea* took on wild, fantastic shapes in the gray dawn.

"Mister!" Black John spoke to the mate. "Mister, as soon as it's light enough, we'll get her head on again. It's gettin' worse steady. Glass still fallin'. The *Medea* can't stand no more o' what we had four days ago. We got to nurse her."

"Yes," said Lappett listlessly. "Yes, but it won't make no diff'rence. It can't—not now."

"If you feel that way, mister, go below. We can carry on without you. The second mate will be here in a minute. He's worth twenty o' you, Lappett!"

The mate, muttering to himself, stayed on the bridge.

JIMMY KERRILL, lying in his bunk, fully dressed, woke with a start.

One of the deck-hands, Trelattick, a Cornishman, was in his room.

"Sir, cap'n wants ye."

Jimmy had already slid out of his blankets and was putting on his sea-boots.

"All right, Trelattick. I'm coming."

The ship gave a sudden lurch.

"Blowin' hard outside, sir," said the seaman. "Seems like we'm in for more trouble. The pumps ain't gettin' rid o' the water, they say, sir, an' we'm settlin' by the starn."

"Rubbish!" said Jimmy, reaching for his oilskins.

Nevertheless, when he reached the deck, the fury of the gale almost drove the breath from his body. He gasped and fought his way up the bridge-ladder.

"Mr. Kerrill," said Black John, "go aft at once with the carpenter an' have a look at the hatches. Make sure everything's fast, an' the derricks. I'm goin' to turn her head on again. We can't stand much more knockin' about than we've had already."

"Very good, sir," said Jimmy.

Black John's manner had become almost friendly.

Day was breaking. In the east the dull red glow of the rising sun showed through a gap in the gray storm clouds.

"Like blood," said the boatswain, as they struggled aft. "Bad, eh?"

"Ain't so bad as 'twas three days ago, Michael," said the little carpenter. "Hi, hang on!"

The white foam of the following sea swept over them, filling the well-deck.

The boatswain and the carpenter paused, clinging to the rail at the break of the bridge-deck, gazing aft at the huge seas that bore down on them.

"Make haste now!" said Jimmy. "Afraid of gettin' your feet wet, Chips, or what?"

The carpenter scrambled down the ladder.

"No, sir," he said, "but you know what I know as well as me an' the bos'n. Look aft, sir!"

Jimmy, up to his thighs in water, made a pretense of not hearing, but the carpenter was right. If the *Medea*, in her present state, down by the stern, water-logged, pooped a sea, they were doomed. Only a miracle could save them.

And so, as at any instant they might be swept over the side, like Cudden, or crashed against the engine-room bulkhead or the winches and maimed or drowned, he laughed and cursed the two men with him and told

them, genially, in a cheerful shout that carried in spite of the wind's roaring, that what they wanted was feeding bottles and bibs and a couple of nurses to look after them and rock them to sleep in their little cots.

"And here, Chips, these wedges are loose."

When they had made sure that the derricks were fast and the tarpaulins firm and the hatch battens in place, they turned to go back to the bridge.

"Mind yourse'f!" yelled the boatswain.

A sea surged over the port bulwarks. Jimmy Kerrill reached for the life-line and slipped.

As he went, under water, struggling and fighting, he remembered Cudden and felt that the end had come. He was over the side at last. In mid-ocean. Drowning. No hope of escape. Choking for breath. His head went crashing against something hard, crashing twice, three times; he had a muffled sensation of being hit by iron hands; his body was wedged tight; he could not move: the noise of the water swirling past roared in his ears.

Then, suddenly, the pressure of the sea on his body relaxed. He was lying on the well-deck against the bitts, half-under water, on his back. The *Medea* rolled to port, and he slid helplessly.

A hand grabbed him by the arm.

"Here ye are, Mr. Kerrill. We got you!"

He came to himself, to find the boatswain and the carpenter dragging him up the ladder to the bridge-deck.

"Thanks! Lord!" There was a stabbing pain in his side as he drew his breath. "Thought I was a goner. Much obliged, you two! Won't forget it!"

In the gray light of the dawn they made their way to the flying-bridge.

"Hullo, sir!" said Chayke. "You've cut your face!"

"Shaving!" said Jimmy briefly.

He went to Black John.

"All fast, sir," he said.

There was something strangely reassuring in the way Black John nodded. He held himself square and upright. His lips relaxed into one of his grim smiles. His eyes were steady under the black eyebrows. If there were any actual danger, and no one knew better than Jimmy Kerrill how desperate their position was, Black John's leather-brown face showed no trace of either fear or worry.

He walked a few paces away from the center of the bridge and stood at the head of the port ladder, clear of the wheel-house and chart-room and gazed aft.

IT WAS daylight at last. Jimmy, his head throbbing from the battering he had had, mopped the blood from his wet forehead, and watched the wild fury of the gale with a breathless wonder, and once more a curious sense of his own futility and helplessness swept over him; great mountains of dirty green water, piled up high, rushing down with almost terrifying speed, curling over and breaking into masses of white foam around the *Medea;* gray storm clouds scudding swiftly across the sky, low down, with ragged edges.

He shivered. The wind had risen to a shriek, as if threatening disaster.

Black John turned the handle of the telegraph to STAND BY.

He moved to the wheel-house door.

Hannigan was at the wheel.

Black John grunted and turned away and stood, holding on to the rail, at the head of the port ladder. There he waited, staring aft.

The men on the bridge watched him in silence. Only the mate, crouched and bent, on the port wing of the bridge, peered out over the canvas dodger, eastward.

"Mr. Kerrill!" said Black John.

"Sir."

"Ring the engines to HALF SPEED!"

As the *Medea* rose on the long, steep slope of a wave, Black John's yell came high and clear above the shriek of the wind.

"Hard a-starboard!"

Hannigan whirled the spokes of the wheel.

The *Medea*, heeling over to port, came slowly round.

The wave had passed.

One of the men yelled:

"She'll do it, —— her! She'll do it!"

The *Medea* reached the hollow, and there she hung, beam on to wind and sea.

Jimmy Kerrill felt his heart go limp within him. A huge mass of water, smooth and green as ice, was racing down. He clung desperately to the rail of the bridge. He heard his own voice shriek a warning to Trelattick, the man nearest him. He heard Lappett scream: "Oh, Gord! Oh, Gord!" He saw a wall of water towering above them like a cliff, curling over and over, while the *Medea* rolled helplessly in the trough.

Then he was conscious of a terrific jar, as the ship was struck; a crash of thunder deafened him; something smashed against his face and head; and though his arms were almost wrenched from their sockets and his feet were washed from under him, he held on.

But they were going, going! This time the *Medea* would sink! He was being suffocated. His senses were leaving him.

Very slowly, the *Medea* rolled herself free.

Amazed and thankful that he still lived, Jimmy Kerrill once more managed to gain a foot-hold on the slippery boards. He dashed the salt water from his eyes and a thrill of horror ran through him.

The port wing of the bridge had gone. Lappett had gone, too.

Black John, his face gray, his eyes shut, lay on his back, gripping an iron upright, all that remained of the port ladder, his legs dangling over the edge of the splintered woodwork where the bridge had broken.

As Jimmy stooped over him he realized that the sea that had wrecked them had driven them back on their course; the wind was once more driving fiercely over their stern.

"Are you hurt, sir?"

Black John looked up at him.

"We've got to make it!" He uttered a groan between his clenched teeth. "Mister, get her round!"

A sea surged toward them, lifted them up, and passed.

Jimmy, his heart thumping furiously, half-afraid that even now they were sinking, looked aft past the smashed wheel-house, across the wreckage of boats and ventilators and davits, at the green water that rushed down on them.

All at once he saw his chance.

Again the *Medea* began to rise.

"Now!" he yelled. "Hard a-starboard!"

Again Hannigan twirled the spokes of the wheel; the head of the *Medea* came round; again, in the hollow, a great mass of water tore down on them. The *Medea* did not falter. Her head, once more rising, came steadily round and round. The huge sea reached them and smashed furiously against the port bow, smothering the forecastle head and filling the forward well-deck. The *Medea* wavered and hung, and then with a sudden rush came round into the wind.

Jimmy yelled.

"Steady as you go!"

"Steady!" said Hannigan. "Nor'-nor'-west!"

"Done it!" said Black John faintly. "Done it!"

He was struggling to his feet, groaning with pain.

From the bridge-deck there came a shout.

"After hatches carried adrift, sir! An' engine-room sky-lights——"

Black John was standing—on one leg, only. The other leg seemed not to be part of him but was twisted sideways as no leg ought to be twisted. The port door of the wheel-house had gone, and he clung to the door-post.

"Mister," he said to Jimmy faintly. "Mister, see to it!" He raised his voice. "All hands—aft as hard as you can!"

"Are you all right, sir?" Jimmy asked.

"Don't jaw!" Black John snapped at him. "Do as you're told! It's the —— ship you're paid to worry about, not me!"

The look in Black John's gray face, the indomitable courage that he saw therein and the fight against the agony in his broken leg, gave Jimmy a sudden shock. He understood. Black John was a better man than himself. A drunken, booze-sodden old swine, but the better man.

"Very good, sir."

He looked at the deck-hands huddled together in the wheel-house, silent, awed, miserable.

"Now, then, stir yourselves!"

He saw Garle's thin, peaked face, dirty and salt-stained.

"You, Garle, hurry!"

He frowned. "What came to Trelattick?"

"He went, sir, with the mate!"

As they made their way through the wreckage on the bridge-deck, the wind at their backs, white-faced firemen were coming out of the fiddley.

"'Ere, mister, for Gord's sake! Are we sinkin'?"

"We're 'bout flooded aht dahn below: fiddley covers gone, sky-lights gone!"

"Are we all right stoppin' down there, mister?"

"Don't jaw!" said Jimmy. He could hear from the stoke-hold Sandy Racken yelling curses at the hands. "Do as you're told. It's the —— ship you're paid to worry about, not yourselves!"

He grinned and ran aft.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE UNTAMABLE TERROR OF THE MOUNTAINS

by **Josiah M. Ward**

THE miners employed in the Homestake had not yet descended into Leadville from their high perch on Homestake peak, and as it was late in April their friends in that city formed a party to break the trail and bring them cheer wherewith to celebrate their release from the grip of the Storm King. For the men who took Winter employment in the Homestake bade farewell to friends and relatives, shut themselves off from communication with the outside world, and went into voluntary exile until the Spring sun melted the snow that blocked the way out.

The merry visitors, with many a prank and song, wended their way upward and upward until they attained the timber line, which marked the situation of the mine and its outer buildings—two bunk-houses and the storehouse. They reached the turn in the road from which the mine was visible.

There was nothing but one vast field of snow in sight and late as it was snow still covered the mountain into which the mine tunneled.

The men who stumbled into this scene with a song upon their lips, now stood silent and aghast. They realized in a flash what had happened. They knew that a snowslide, the untamable terror of the mountains, had descended upon the mine and that the comrades they had come hither to greet were beneath that pall of snow.

Dead or alive?

There was no smoke drifting up from the buried buildings.

Ominous?—yes; but they wasted no time in conjecture, and feverishly attacked the massive snow-bank with the shovels they had brought along to break the trail. The fastest runner was dispatched to Leadville for aid. A relief party headed by Major George W. Cook responded.

After days of digging and delving the bunkhouses were uncovered, sixty feet below the crest of the snow, and the scenes within their walls laid bare.

Death, evidently, had struck the men at the very moment the avalanche encompassed them, and there, in the exact attitude of that last moment their friends found them. The first encountered was lying in his bunk, where he had been reading by the light of an oil lamp, and but for the wide open eyes one would have supposed that he had fallen asleep over his book. Two, playing cards at a table, had merely dropped their hands and bent forward. Two men lying in one bunk were asleep when the blow fell and their closed eyes and easy positions bore evidence that death, mercifully, had not broken their slumber. One man was kneeling beside his bunk; another, lying in his bunk, had raised an arm to fend off a falling log. The others were crushed by timbers. Eleven in all.

It was not difficult for the Leadville party—miners who read mining-life signs as an Indian reads a trail—to fix a date, relatively, for the catastrophe. The amount and condition of the supplies in the storehouse, with other data, guided them to the conclusion that the snowslide occurred on the evening of February twenty-third.

Very similar to this tragedy in its features was the Robinson, Colorado, mine disaster in which the lives of eleven miners were snapped off. It was after supper when the snowslide descended like a blanket from the slope above and covered the cabins with fifty feet of snow. Six weeks passed before the catastrophe became known. When the cabins were uncovered it was made apparent that the death of the occupants was instantaneous.

One man was pulling off a boot and his stiff and lifeless form bent over in his chair just as he in life bent. Two seated at a table leaned forward exactly as the card players in the Homestake leaned, and the cards had fallen from their hands to the table. Another was lying on a cot and must have been reading when the flame of life flickered out, for a book had dropped from his upraised fingers and lay upon his chest. Other men died while they slept.

Sometimes—oft-times in fact—chance

baffles this terror of the mountains and robs it of its prey. An instance of this kind was that of a Winter mail carrier between Ouray and Red Mountain in southern Colorado. While making his way along the road on skis he was suddenly overwhelmed by a snowslide originating from a bank scarcely higher than his head and thrown upon a sloping decline near the road. Although violently shocked he did not lose his senses, but his strenuous efforts to release himself from the encompassing burden were unavailing. Succumbing to the situation, he ceased to struggle, and with his right arm guarding his face, he lay prone waiting for the end.

The failure of the postman to appear at Red Mountain that day did not excite apprehension. Storms had detained him before and one had set in soon after he left Ouray; besides he was newly married. The next day he did not appear and a telegram of inquiry was sent to Ouray. The result was that relief parties were dispatched from both points and met at the snowslide blocking the road. There was no doubt in their minds that the carrier lay dead underneath this snow, and while some attacked the pile with shovels others hurried to Ouray for assistance and means to convey the body home.

The news could not be kept from the wife, who insisted upon accompanying the undertaker and the relief party on their return. So, with an augmented force of sorrowing citizens they set forth. The hearse was a large sled.

Soon after the wife and her cortége arrived the body was partly exposed and all pressed anxiously forward. They were amazed to see it move and before they had recovered from their astonishment the remaining snow was pitched off by the supposed corpse who, whilst struggling to arise but unable to do so from weakness and stiffness, remarked in a voice scarcely above a whisper——

"You were a long time coming, boys."

The postman's life had been preserved by one of those chances which the critics forbid novelists to use. When he fell upon his face his head lay over a small gully in which trickled a tiny stream. The snow did not obstruct the water and through this providential channel enough air reached the carrier to keep him alive.

In the same region, a mail carrier laden with a heavy sack was knocked head foremost off the road by a slide which was barely large enough to cover him. In fact, it did not completely cover him, his feet projecting upward from the pile. He was not rendered unconscious by the fall—the grim evidences of his struggle for life plainly showed that—and he could easily have righted himself except for one fell circumstance; the long Norwegian skis soundly strapped to his feet lay flat upon the surface of the snow and effectually pinned him down. There he miserably suffocated.

It is difficult for a person unacquainted with the operations of snowslides to comprehend their tremendous force. Snow suggests lightness. It has weight, however, and when a body of it weighing, probably, a thousand tons, starts on its mile or two-mile course down a mountainside, trees, rocks, houses, fallen timber, everything it encounters is swept along in one conglomerate mass.

Sometimes, when the slide is unusually great and long, movable objects are sucked into the vacuum created by its passage, and trees not touched curl over in its wake and snap off as if in a hurricane. Yet another slide may cut straight through a house, carrying part away and leaving the remainder standing with not so much as a chair upset.

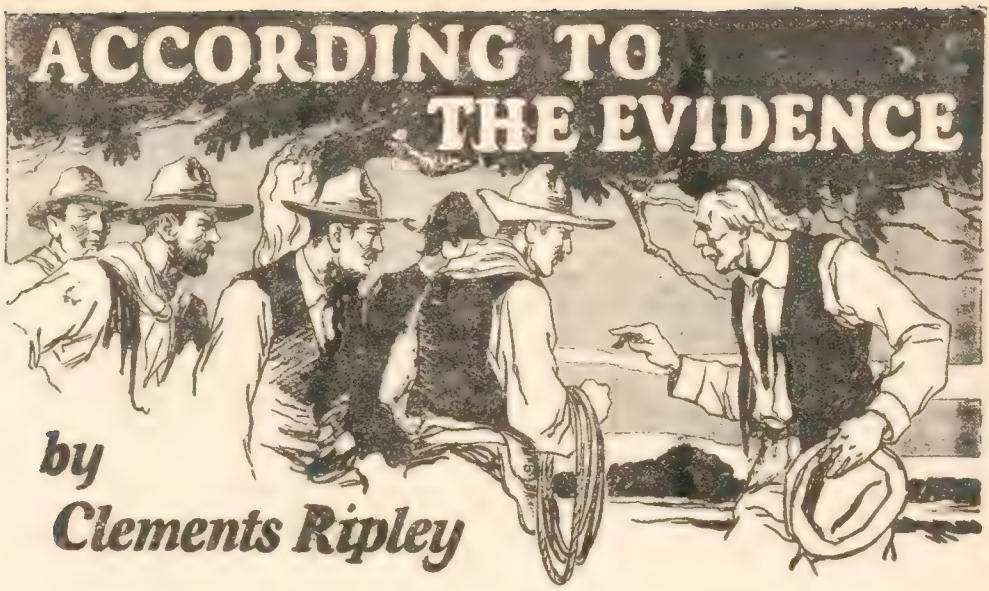
In the Liberty Bell Mine catastrophe, near Telluride, Colorado, a building was completely wrecked by the suction of a slide; the same slide, striking a bunk-house, tore off one room and killed the two men who occupied it, while the other half was not budged from its foundation, nor was a miner in that room injured.

There is the avalanche which descends with terrific swiftness combined with miraculous gentleness. Of all snowslides, this is the most baffling, yet its occurrence is too well known to question. The white death, enveloped in a Winter mantle, descends upon a man seated at a table raising a cup to his lips. It delivers its petrific stroke. The cup falls from his palsied hand, and when found, weeks later, the man, dead and frozen, still sits at the table as if dumbly waiting for some one to bring him another cup.

How can such things be? you ask.

The medical autopsy yields the only tenable explanation. This is that the incalculably sudden compression of air produces concussion of the brain and simultaneous rupture of a brain blood vessel.

ACCORDING TO THE EVIDENCE



by Clements Ripley

Author of "Where the Trail Ended" and "An Unpleasant Episode."

THE car jolted heavily over the hard ruts, and the sheriff, as he clung to the wheel cursed bitterly. The car was a high-powered one, and it was popularly believed that the sheriff took it to bed with him at night. It was already making more than was good for it, considering the state of the roads. "Doc" Piper, sitting beside him on the front seat, could hardly have helped knowing this; so much might have been inferred by the weird, double-hung expletives to which he gave vent every time his grizzled head hit the top. And yet Doc Piper never ceased to urge more speed.

"Can't you hit her up a little?" he grunted between jolts.

Now the sheriff was suffering with the mechanism at every smash, and his negative was somewhat ungracious.

"No use of all this hurryin'," he gasped, as a sudden wrench flung him against the wheel. "No use goin' there at all that I can see."

Doc Piper let go the side of the seat to make a wild clutch at his battered felt hat. Instantly his head hit the top again. Even in the midst of his agony the sheriff found heart to grin at his comments.

Then, as they struck a moderately smooth patch of road—

"What do you aim to do when you get there, Doc?" he queried.

"Stop the lynching," was the reply.

"Huh. You got a good sized job on your hands. How do you aim to do it?"

Doc Piper's wizened face expanded in a bland smile.

"How do I know—yet?" he said.

The sheriff snorted.

"It's —— foolishness," he growled. "I wouldn't have come out here for any man but you. I'll look like a fine fool, won't I, buttin' into this thing and havin' to stand by and look on while they swing the cuss. You can't do anything with that crowd."

"Well," suggested Doc Piper gently, "the boys know me pretty well, and maybe they'll listen to me."

"The boys? Say, doc, do you know who's in this thing? Every decent, law-abiding man within ten miles."

The sheriff smacked his clenched fist down on the wheel.

"By ——, if I wasn't sheriff I'd be in it myself. There's been a whole lot too much of this killin' and general —— raisin' lately. Teach the son-of-a-gun a lesson."

"Hanging a man don't teach him much," objected Doc Piper mildly, "and it don't teach the rest of 'em anything but disregard of the law. Can't you hit her up a little more, Henry?"

Savagely the sheriff stepped on the gas, unconsciously expressing his state of mind

in the way he did it. Out of regard for Doc Piper he had let himself be persuaded on this fool's errand, and he heartily regretted it. Naturally it was his duty as sheriff to stop lynchings, but this insane attempt could end in only one way. He and the little doctor, with their hands in the air, would be forced to watch the proceedings, which would inevitably proceed in spite of anything they could do.

The little doctor was quick to sense what was going on in his mind. He had known Henry Rogers a long time, long enough to dismiss any possible suspicion that the sheriff was afraid. Let him once have a prisoner in custody and an attacking mob would have on its hands as pretty a fight as a man could wish to see. But there was one thing the sheriff hated and feared, and that was to be made ridiculous. They would tell the story for a long time in the cow-country of how the representative of the law had been forced to watch a lynching that he had been powerless to prevent.

"It's tough on you, I know, Henry," the little doctor sympathized, "but this country hasn't been settled down to law and order so long that it can afford to have a lynching. And there's just a chance that we can put it across."

"Fat chance," sneered the sheriff morosely. "An' I hope you'll credit me with havin' made a —— fool of myself to please you—after it's all over."

Doc Piper laid a wrinkled brown hand on his companion's knee.

"I know," he said gently. "I got you into it. I feel right bad about that. But I'll tell you what we'll do. You just run me down to Higbee's and leave me. The crowd needn't see you at all."

The little doctor knew his man. The sheriff straightened and gazed at him from under beetling brows. Then he grinned broadly.

"You little horn-toad," he remarked affectionately.

"Humph," grunted Doc Piper, satisfied. "Just as pig-headed as ever, aren't you, Henry? Fact though, it's just occurred to me that the more you keep yourself out of sight the better. It's just possible that there might be a chance of getting your man away, and if they're not watching out for you—so much the better."

"How do you aim to work it?"

"I don't know just yet— Here's a good piece of road, Henry. You might let her out some— I'll talk to 'em a little. You try to get somewhere where you can be out of sight and still keep an eye on things. If you see a chance, grab your man and go. I'll bet he won't make any objection."

"Well," agreed the sheriff dubiously, "it's your party. Run it to suit yourself."

That the old man intended to do this very thing was evident a moment later when they turned in at the Higbee gate.

"Better stop the car here, Henry," he directed. "It's only a step to the corral. I'll go on alone."

And so, alone and on foot, Doc Piper turned the corner of the barn and faced the lynchers.

He had known he would find them there, in the half-circle, bounded on one side by the outbuildings of the Higbee ranch, and on the other by the corral-fence. And he had known, almost to a man, whom he should find. In his mind he ran over the list; neighboring farmers, small cattle owners, all the better element of the community.

There was no mob spirit in these men, and no disorder. They sat their horses in groups, quietly, or stood about in low-voiced conversation. The little old doctor had known he would find it so. Thirty years of active practise, of hearing their troubles and their joys had taught him to know these people. And yet even Doc Piper, had he happened casually on the gathering, could hardly have divined their purpose.

Knowing what he knew, however, he was quick to sense the underlying tenseness, just as his keen glance took in the two men on the edge of the gathering who were tying a seven-wrapped noose in a length of rope.

THERE was a look of surprize on their faces as he came forward, his huge rusty spurs dragging; a most unheroic little figure, with his bow-legs, and his battered felt hat. But their greeting was one of quiet respect. The little man had proved himself before now, and there were few among them who had not at some time had cause to be grateful for the spirit which surmounted all obstacles of wind, weather and fatigue, to help them in their hour of need.

So now it was—

" 'Lo, Doc!"

"H'aryuh, Doc?"

The commonplace syllables were stamped with a certain quality in the tone that meant a definite regard.

One of the younger men ventured a forced pleasantry and laughed nervously at it himself, until some one swiftly silenced him.

"Boys," said Doc Piper, at a loss before their steady regard, "I've come to tell you that you mustn't do this thing."

He stopped, suddenly conscious that he had made a bad beginning. Faces darkened around him, and he caught a muttered—

"Who the ——'s goin' to stop us?" from the back of the group.

It was Kennedy, round-faced and earnest, from the next ranch, who explained.

"I know you don't like it, Doc," he said. "We don't like it much ourselves, but something's got to be done, and we aim to do it."

"The law—" began the doctor.

"The law don't seem to do the trick," Kennedy cut in. "There's been too much killin' and stealin' around here lately and we aim to stop it."

"You won't stop it this way."

"We reckon to. This here's a clear case. The skunk robbed Jim Higbee and shot him. Shot him in cold blood, almost where you're standin'. It's no use, Doc. We're goin' to swing him."

Doc Piper looked from one to another, his bushy, gray brows knotted beneath his battered hat brim. The faces told the same story. They were quiet but resolved.

"Dear me," said Doc Piper. "Dear me!"

It was characteristic of the little man that, while almost any triviality might bring forth amazing double-barreled expletives, it took a real crisis to produce a remark like the foregoing.

The men who had been knotting the rope finished and came forward to listen.

"Shot him down in cold blood, you say?" repeated Doc Piper. "My goodness! Jim was a good friend of mine. A good friend."

There was a very sincere grief in the commonplace words. There had been many ties between the two men, not the least of which was the fact that both were old bachelors, living alone.

"Makes it all the more reason why you'd ought to be with us, instead of against us," urged Kennedy. "Jim Higbee was as good a man as ever stepped."

"I know. I know. I'd be willing to pull on the rope myself—almost. But lynching— Goodness me, suppose you got the wrong man."

"No danger of that this time," stated Kennedy positively. "We got the skunk dead to rights."

"Humph! Anybody see the shooting?"

"Well, no. Jim was all alone. Nobody didn't see it exactly, but——"

"Then how can you be sure——"

There was a sudden commotion in the group as a man shouldered his way through from the rear, a lean, tall man, with his broad-brimmed hat canted sidewise on his head, and a heavy, undershot jaw.

"What the ——'s the use of standin' here gabbin'?" he demanded. "Let's swing the cuss and go."

There was an instant's silence, while the speaker stared belligerently at Doc Piper, who stood his ground.

He stretched forth a lean brown forefinger and tapped the man's chest.

"You're in a good deal of a hurry, Jess, it seems to me," he remarked quietly.

The other scowled. He was a man of quick and violent decisions, known to all as a good neighbor and a just one, but one who brooked no interference.

"It don't make no difference how it seems to you," he retorted. "Who invited you into this party, anyway?"

It was Kennedy who answered. He wheeled on the offender and fixed him with a level gaze.

"I don't know who invited the Doc here," he said slowly, "or if maybe he invited himself. But I can tell you who invited him to ride eighteen miles through a norther one night last Winter to see you when you had a belly-ache. If the Doc wants to talk he's goin' to talk, Jess Bloove."

There were snickers from the crowd, and Bloove flushed. They had not forgotten the night he thought he was dying of appendicitis, nor had they forgotten Doc Piper's comments on that occasion.

The interlude seemed to lighten the tension a little. The doctor began to drop back into his normal, or sick-bed manner, which resembled that of an irascible tug-boat captain in a heavy seaway. A crowd of strangers would have resented it to the point of violence. But Doc Piper was not among strangers. He was among his own people, who took him in connection with the gentleness of his lean, brown hands, and the warmth of his heart, and loved him.

So, when he overwhelmed them with strange epithets of his own devising, they took the scowl on his wizened face for what it was worth, discounted it against the inevitable twinkle in his frosty blue eyes, and listened with sheepish grins.

Only on one point they were adamant. They had their man, and they intended to hang him.

"It's no use, Doc," said Kennedy earnestly, at length. "We're not a mob. We're, as you might say, a committee. We know what we're doin', and we aim to do it—by daylight, with our faces showin'."

"You're a pack of half-wits," retorted the doctor, "but if there's a mush-headed zany in the lot of you who can prove to me that you've got the right man, I'm dod-rotted if I don't stick with you."

"Easy," Kennedy told him. "Bloove, here, got him. Tell the doctor about it, Jess."

"Hold on," interrupted the little man as Bloove stepped forward importantly. "You're a —— of a committee, you are. D'you mean to say you're going to hold a hearing on this case without the accused?"

"All right," agreed Kennedy patiently. "You know, Doc, we want to have everything regular." He raised his voice. "Hey, trot him out," he called.

The door of one of the near-by outbuildings opened, and two men came out, dragging a third between them.

They stood him on his feet in front of Doc Piper. He was a thin, rat-faced little man in shapeless, blue overalls. The rope which bound his hands behind him was obviously superfluous, for the man was incapable from sheer terror. This was attested to when the doctor spoke to him. He stood dumb and shaking, the labored breath whistling between his clenched teeth. There were other details, which need not be mentioned here.

"There's your man, Doc," said Kennedy. "Now, Jess."

Again Bloove stepped forward, a trifle impatiently, but not at all averse to holding the center of the stage for a time.

"It was like this," he explained, in the manner of one on the witness stand. "I come down here yest'day evenin' to see Jim Higbee. I done owed him fifteen hundred dollars, and it was due and I didn't have only a thousand of it."

"You done paid him the thousand?" prompted Kennedy.

"Yeh. In bills. That's how come him to have it this mornin'. An' I ask him could I have a little more time on the other five hundred."

"Humph! Did he give it to you?" questioned the doctor.

"Well, not exactly," Bloove admitted. "He was a-hittin' me up to sell some steers and pay it all off. We sawed back an' forth consid'able. What's that got to do with it?"

"Never mind. Go on with your story."

"Well, I told him I'd think it over and be down this mornin' to see him about it. It seemed like there wasn't no way I could make out to raise the money without I'd have to take consid'able loss, and I come down to tell him so.

"I was about five hundred yards from the house, here, when I heard a shot. I didn't think nothin' of it—thought it might be Jim shootin' a rat maybe.

"Well, just as I come around the corner over there, I seen this here—" indicating the prisoner with a contemptuous thumb—"ridin' off like —— on Jim's horse. And Jim—" he dropped his voice impressively—"Jim was layin' face down, all spraddled out, right about where you're standin'."

Unconsciously the little doctor shifted his ground.

"It didn't take me a second to see that Jim was dead," Bloove went on, solemnly enjoying his narrative, "an' layin' about ten feet off was this."

He reached into his side-pocket and produced a Colt's automatic.

"Where's your own gun?" snapped Doc Piper suddenly.

"I wasn't totin' none," Bloove answered. "I just grabbed up this one and took out after the feller. He seen me coming and give me a run of a coupla miles. When he seen I was due to catch him he threw this here into the brush. After I got him I went back and made him pick it up."

He reached into his inside-pocket and brought forth a leather bill-fold, which he put in Doc Piper's outstretched hand.

"Jim Higbee's wallet," he stated impressively, "with one thousand and forty dollars in it."

There was silence for a moment. Then Kennedy spoke.

"Well, Doc," he said, "I reckon that proves we got the right man."

"Humph! Sounds like it on the face of it."

"Well, what more do you want?" demanded Bloove.

"What more? Why, dod-blast it, the other fellow's story of course."

Bloove laughed harshly and spat.

"He claims he bought the horse off Jim Higbee," he sneered.

Doc Piper turned to the prisoner, who stood as if in a daze between his guards.

"Well, did you buy the horse?" he asked quietly.

The man tried to answer, but it seemed as if his fear-palsied tongue could not form the words. He gave a low moan.

Doc Piper repeated his question, and at length the man managed to nod an affirmative.

"Forty dollars," he said thickly.

"Hm, yes. And how about the wallet and the money? How do you explain that?"

AT LAST the man seemed to have found his tongue, and the shaken speech burst from him like a flood.

He screamed that he knew nothing about the wallet. He had never seen or heard of it before. He was a poor man, and everybody was against him. He had been traveling through the country, looking for work——

"That's so," one of the crowd cut in suddenly. "He stopped at my place yesterday and hit me up for a job. I couldn't make out to use him this time of year."

The confirmation of this much of his story seemed to give the man heart. He went on more calmly:

"My horse done went lame on me three days back," he said, "an' I sold him. I seen this here horse in the corral when I was passin' this mornin', an' I done stopped an' bought him off the feller. I give forty dollars for it. There's the horse over there."

He pointed, and Doc Piper recognized the horse, saddled and tied to the corral-fence as one he had often seen Higbee ride.

"That's the one he was ridin' when I come up with him," confirmed Bloove.

"I swear I done bought it," the prisoner broke in hoarsely. "I swear I did. Honest. An' I was just a-ridin' off, peaceable-like, and not hurtin' nobody, when he—he pointed at Bloove— "he come up with me and run me back here. I don't know nothin' about the money nor the killin'. Don't let 'em hang me. For —— sake, don't let 'em."

He cowered to Doc Piper's side, searching the faces about him for a ray of hope, and finding none.

"Well, Doc, are you satisfied?" asked Kennedy after a pause.

"Satisfied? Yes I'm satisfied. Satisfied that you're a worse pack of dod-rotted, popeyed zanies than I ever knew could draw the breath of life."

"But, Doc. For the love of Mike——"

"Don't argue with me, you mush-heads. Why if there was twice as much sense in this crowd you'd be half-witted. Do you seriously mean to tell me that you'd hang a man on such evidence as that?"

"It—it looks like pretty good evidence to me," suggested one of the crowd timidly.

Doc Piper turned on him.

"Oh, it does, does it?" he snapped. "And you still believe in Santa Claus, too, I suppose. And next you'll tell me that a left-handed man shoots that thing there—a Colt's automatic, with the safety on the left side for your right thumb to work. About as easy to shoot that with your left hand as to put your left hand in your right pants' pocket. Oh, it can be done, of course, but do you seriously mean to tell me that you're sap-head enough to think a left-handed man shoots that for choice? Are you, eh?"

There was a murmur of wondering admiration from the crowd. Doc Piper knew he had them started, but it was ticklish going. He put up a silent prayer that somewhere out of sight the sheriff might be watching and listening.

"Ever think of that?" he asked. "Did you, eh? No, I'll bet you didn't."

But Kennedy, his moon-face solemn with the effort, was thinking earnestly.

"That's all right, Doc," he agreed cautiously, "but what makes you so sure——"

Again Doc Piper's lean, brown forefinger shot out and punched him on the chest.

"Sure?" he cut in, "Sure? You blithering idiot, I'm the one man in this crowd who's got sense enough not to be sure of anything. That's my business; that and using my eyes instead of listening to every wild story anybody tells me. That's only one thing; only a pointer. A left-handed man doesn't shoot a Colt's automatic, as any one with more intelligence than a protoplasm would have realized.

"Higbee was killed with a Colt's automatic. Well, then, Higbee was probably killed by a right-handed man."

There were murmurs of, "Gosh, that's right," from the crowd.

"Well, who did kill him then?" demanded others.

"Who killed him? Well, I don't set myself up as knowing everything, like some folks I could name, but I can use my eyes and see where the evidence points.

"Of course," he broke off, his tone filled with biting irony, "if you simply want to hang somebody, why this man will probably do as well as the next. Don't let me delay you. But if you have any preference for getting the right man you might use the brains God gave you—if any."

"Go on, Doc," breathed the crowd, almost as one man.

Doc Piper pushed up his battered hat and scratched his grizzled head. He had something the feeling of a man who has grabbed a bear by the tail, and feels that it would be a mistake to let go.

"Humph!" he snorted. "Figure it out. First look there."

He pointed to the dead man's horse, standing saddled and tied to the corral-fence.

"Look at it," he repeated. "Go on over there, every numbskull in this pack of nitwits and look at that horse. If you have eyes to see with, what you'll see will tell you something."

As the little doctor had intended the crowd began to move in the direction of the corral. In the ensuing confusion very little attention was paid to the prisoner, and Doc Piper was able to drop a word in his ear.

"If they take their attention off you," he whispered, "walk, not run, to the shed over there and slip around the corner."

The man gave no sign of understanding, but as Doc Piper watched him out of the tail of his eye he saw him gradually edge toward the outside of the circle which the crowd made about the horse.

The little doctor, on the other hand, pushed his way in with as much commotion as possible and took his stand, bow-legs apart, and thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. The crowd gazed at him helplessly.

"Well," he demanded, "what do you see?"

There was no answer.

"Nothing, eh? You're a fine gang of lynchers, you are. Hanging a man's serious business. You make me sick."

"But look here, Doc," suggested one, "what about the horse, anyway? I'll bite."

"I'll tell you about the horse when the time comes, if you haven't sense enough to see it for yourself."

"Well," announced Kennedy slowly, a look of puzzlement on his moon-face, "I'd trust a lot to your judgment, but the evidence——"

"Evidence!" snorted Doc Piper. "What do you know about evidence? Here comes a man, a right-handed man, carrying a Colt's automatic with one shell gone. He's a man who admits to having been in the vicinity when the killing occurred. He's got the dead man's wallet in his pocket, and he admits to knowing, and to being the only one that did know, that there's a thousand dollars in that wallet."

Kennedy's jaw dropped and his eyes were round.

"But, Doc," he gasped. "For —— sake—He's a man I've known all my life. He's a good neighbor, and——"

"Be still," thundered the little doctor, and the crowd barely breathed. "The question is not as to whether this man or that is a good neighbor. The question is, 'Who killed Jim Higbee?' "

He turned suddenly on Bloove, who stood stupefied and speechless.

"You," he said, and every word had a deadly emphasis, "you paid Jim Higbee a thousand dollars last night. You knew that he wouldn't have had time to deposit it this morning. You came down here early this morning before the banks would be open."

He turned again to the crowd, who listened open-mouthed.

"He'll deny it," he warned them. "He'll swear it isn't true, and tell the same wild story he took you in with before, when he accused another man, the man he was in such a hurry to hang."

BLOOVE, dazed at first by the sudden turn affairs had taken, was beginning to come to his powers of speech again. He moistened his dry lips.

"It's a —— lie," he croaked in a broken, unnatural voice. "It's a —— lie. I never——"

"I told you he'd deny it, didn't I?" cut in Doc Piper contemptuously. "Naturally he would—just as you or I would. But I've shown you the facts. Figure 'em out to suit yourselves."

"It's a —— lie," screamed Bloove again.

"I come down here to settle with Jim Higbee about that five hundred——"

"Just a minute, Jess," interrupted Doc Piper, not unkindly. "You've already told your story. If you have anything you want to add to it now's the time. But I don't believe it's necessary for you to tell it again."

"What do you want to do?" he asked, turning to Kennedy.

"Why, Doc, I don't hardly know. You see—well—it's kind of hard to— Gosh, Doc, I don't know," he concluded helplessly.

"Humph! You knew well enough ten minutes ago, when it was a stranger you were all set to hang."

Kennedy was nearly as white as Bloove, but at the little doctor's words he set his jaw.

"We started out to hang the man that killed Jim Higbee," he stated slowly, "and so far as I'm concerned, I aim to go through with it. What do you say?" he asked, turning to the others.

The circle suddenly closed in about the new victim, and there was a murmur of assent, suddenly drowned by Bloove's voice screaming protestations of innocence.

He appealed to one after another by name; men he had known all his life. They heard him without emotion, with set, expressionless faces. And as he looked from one to another and saw no ray of hope or encouragement he stopped suddenly and stared at the ground in front of him.

"Who's got the rope?" demanded Doc Piper, and as no one moved. "Who's got the rope?" again.

And then, as the man who carried it came slowly forward, the little doctor heard what he had been listening for, the deep hum of a powerful motor, swiftly dying in the distance.

The man with the rope stopped short in his tracks, and turned with the rest of the crowd to listen.

"Well, hurry up," snapped Doc Piper. "Bring it along, Jim Adams; you that came out in such a hurry to hang a man that you left your wife in bed with a two-day-old baby. Let's see who's itching to hang a neighbor. Volunteers one pace to the front."

There was a moment of shocked silence.

"Doc," said Kennedy earnestly, "that don't seem right. Even if we are goin' to swing him it don't seem right we should get funny about it."

"Doesn't, eh? Well, dad-blame you, it is funny if you had sense enough to see it. ——, I never saw such a set of hammerheads in my life."

"What's wrong now?"

Doc Piper raised his arms and called heaven to witness that never in his born days had his lot been cast with such a pack of triple-distilled morons. He raged and blasphemed, and at the end he inquired of all and sundry if they believed in fairies. It was a purely rhetorical question, which nobody answered.

"And so," he concluded, his voice metallic, "you're not a mob, you're a committee. You're a bunch of hard-headed intelligent cattle-men. Nobody could fool you, could they? You wouldn't hang a man without looking at all the evidence, would you?

"Humph! Right in front of you stands the dead man's horse trying to tell you whether Bloove is telling the truth or not, and you won't listen."

"We'll listen, Doc," interrupted Kennedy, "if you'll get down to business and tell us."

"Oh, yes. You'll listen to anything anybody tells you."

The little doctor leveled a lean, brown, impressive forefinger at his moon-face.

"Do you think," he asked, "that if one of the main points in a man's story is fishy it's all likely to be fishy?"

"Yeh, it'd look like that to me."

"All right. Do you think that if a man stole a horse he'd likely be the one that shot the owner?"

"But I thought you done proved that he didn't steal the horse."

"You'd make a fine juryman, wouldn't you? You, sap-head, I didn't prove anything. Look at that horse. Look at that saddle. The stirrups are the length Jim Higbee rode, and he was six feet four. If that little man you were fixing to hang bought the horse, all above-board, he'd stop and fix the stirrups his own length, wouldn't he? But if he stole the horse and shot the owner he'd feel like making a quick getaway. And he'd ride those stirrups as they are."

To Bloove, who had been listening in despair, without realizing how things were going, came a ray of light.

"It's true," he shouted suddenly. "It's true like he's tellin' you. God knows it's

true, ain't it, Doc." He gave a wild laugh. "I knowed all the time you was only funnin' with me."

"I'm glad to have given you so much entertainment, Jess," commented Doc Piper drily. "And it might be that you and the rest of these cuckoos have learned something out of it."

But Kennedy, his wide brow wrinkled with the effort, had been thinking.

"That's all right, Doc," he interrupted, "an' we all know you mean it for the best, but you done proved to us once that that other feller couldn't have done the shootin', on account he was left-handed."

Doc Piper tore his battered hat from his head and flung it on the ground in a gesture of helpless rage.

"By the living, breathing Jingo, Bill Kennedy," he howled. "You're the most one-ideared wampus in seven states. I never said the cuss was left-handed. How in the name of the Great American Whoopentucket could I know whether he was left-handed when his hands were tied behind him? I simply suggested that if he should be left-handed— Oh, what's the use."

"Well, trot him out, and let's see?" suggested one of the others. "Shiply, you had him. Where is he?"

"Why—why—" began the man questioned, looking about him, "I thought——"

"Never mind looking," broke in Doc Piper, now thoroughly enjoying himself. "He's with the sheriff, half-way to the county seat by now, where he'll be tried, and probably hanged by due process of law, instead of by a gang of dad-blamed, mush-headed cowmen."

There was a moment's consternation. Then somebody laughed, and the laughter spread like an infection. Men suddenly released from a high tension bent double and howled their mirth to high heaven. And in the midst of it stood the little wizened doctor, benevolently cursing everybody and demanding to know who was going to give him a lift back to town.

A PROMISE

by Leonard H. Nason

IN JUNE of 1917, a very promising young man was ejected from the first officers' training camp at Plattsburg. He had expressed the opinion that some of his superior officers wouldn't make good cook's police in the Medical Corps. To his friends he bade a sad farewell, and to his enemies, of whom there were a great number, he made derisive gestures with thumb and nose, crying, "I'll be in France before any of you hombres have learned to stand at attention properly." To which his enemies replied, "Let us know when they hang you, so we can come and applaud."

The promising young man then enlisted in the regular army, and in due course went to France and did battle with the enemy.

In August, 1918, the same young man was standing by the A. P. M.'s desk in Tours, waiting for some one to take him to Caserne Lafeyette, so that he might eat. He had been through two major engagements, had been wounded, and was on his way back to the front again. A large M. P. shoved him to one side.

"You gotta wait awhile," said the M. P., "until these officers checks out." The young man rubbed his eyes. One after the other, a number of his former companions at Plattsburg passed before him, all looking very down-hearted and discouraged.

"Where's that bunch going?" the young man asked the M. P.

"Officers of the 76th division," was the reply. "Their outfit was broken up as soon as they landed, and they're going to the officers' dump at Blois. They'll probably make R. T. O.'s or some other gold brick thing out of 'em."

The young man thought of stepping up and loudly reminding them of his promise, but he was dirty, ragged, and unshaven. Moreover, it was plain that his former comrades were in no mood for pleasantry. A year or so in the army had taught the young man quite a lot about subordination and the gulf between an enlisted man and an officer, so he held his peace and contented himself with the first hearty laugh he had had in some months.

ON THE WATERFRONT

by Gordon Young

Author of "Hurricane Williams' Vengeance," Wrong Blood, Strong Blood," etc.

THERE they sat, the three of them, all down at the mouth, as melancholic as hungry Dutchmen, who are the saddest people in the world on an empty stomach. The piano crashed a rattling melody under the lanky coon's long fingers; girls squeaked; but 'Arry Coy, the Duke and Dick Webster, sailormen, heeded not the merriment. There wasn't twenty cents between them, nothing warm within them, and outside it was a cold wet foggy Frisco night.

"A —— hof a worl'," said 'Arry Coy.

"Aw pipe down," said Dick Webster. "I can think my own black thoughts without any Cockney croaker sticking in his oar."

"Hi 'll give yer a biff hin the heye!" said 'Arry Coy, who was about the size of Webster's thumb.

"An' if I ever find it out I'll drown you in a beer-glass."

While Webster tormented the Cockney, who enjoyed a quarrel about as much as a wasp enjoys flourishing his tail-piece, the Duke leaned heavily on his elbows and seemed to be gazing with meditative dejection at a spot of spilled beer on the black table-top. From the look of him he was wishing that it was deep enough to drown himself there where flies waded about drunkenly. Now and then a fly would rise and with a heavy buzz alight on somebody's face, then with sticky feet pick its way through whisker stubble.

'Arry Coy was slightly larger than a hulled peanut. He was young; he was hard and tough and wicked; an ugly morsel of flesh, with a nose like a bird's beak, and he wrinkled it when puzzled. 'Arry had blue eyes, a rasping sharp voice, oversized ears that he could wiggle and a tongue that was never still. He even talked in his sleep. He had been born in a London gutter and raised in a windjammer's scupper.

And they loved him like a brother, a pesky small brother, one they swore at, now and then kicked, but allowed no one else to pick on.

Duke was tall and dark, with the air of a man who had acquired fine manners in his cradle and couldn't get rid of them, no matter what he did—which was why they called him the Duke; and one name being as good as another for a wastrel on the outer edge of the world's rough spots, he seldom used any other.

The Duke was a bit fastidious about himself, and on every new ship he had to fight a man or two before the crew would let him file his nails in peace. Anyway, he was much too handsome to be well-liked until he had swung his fists into somebody's face.

Stripped, Duke showed as fine a body as

any old Greek that was ever cut out of marble, though his waist was a little too slender for forecastle manhood and his arms too smoothly muscled. There wasn't a blemish or needle's prick anywhere on his skin.

He had a long straight nose, a high brow, eyes that were dark and deceptively gentle for one who was ever ready to take up a fight; but he fought like a fencer and rarely closed with a man, boxing with alert ease, cool, quick, graceful, a bit showy perhaps, usually a little contemptuous, but he had the kick of a boom on the gybe.

In every way he had strange gifts for a forecastle man. He could ride, he could shoot, he could dance; there seemed to be hardly anything that he could not do, and effortlessly. He could play fiddle, accordion, piano or jew's harp; he could talk to squareheads and dagoes in their own tongue. But he was cursed with black moods, and at such times he threw a wet blanket like an aura. When the Duke was in the dumps booze, women nor a riot could make him sit up and take an interest in life.

But in spite of all that, the tough little 'Arry Coy and the heavy-handed roistering devil-riding Webster knew him for a good fellow; at times too full of long silences, at other times too full of sour words; but he knew the proper use of a dry throat, and with a wet one could sing his song with the best on those days when a black shadow did not lie across him.

"Hi tell yer it's this way habout the Duke. 'E was borned wiv a gold spoon in 'is mouf, an' 'e lost it. So 'e 'ad to tyke to the sea and eat wiv 'is fingers, like us."

Such was 'Arry Coy's not wholly illogical reasoning.

Some thirty hours before the three of them had been paid off, each with ten months' wages in his pockets, minus slop-chest robbery and a fine or two.

They had landed in wrinkled shore-clothes and pockets weighted with silver and gold.

After a round of drinks, three whiskys to the man, Duke warped them into a Turkish bath and sent their clothes to be pressed while they were getting the salt and tar off their hides.

"—— bli'me, they cooks yer like a ship's puddin', they do," said 'Arry, wrinkling his nose doubtfully at the cloud of steam.

They were steamed, scalded, baked, spanked, scraped, then chilled; after which they fared forth to enjoy themselves.

Webster, who knew the symptoms, saw the black mood drawing on the Duke, and tried hot whiskys, but it was no use. The Duke had stumbled into the dumps.

At such times he was never aggressively disagreeable. He merely conveyed to those about him something of the sensation of a wet dog in bed with them, a quiet fellow, peaceable, almost affectionate. He went wherever the others went, but there was no joy in him; he might drink until he staggered from the weight of what he carried, but he remained inconsolably sober and with lusterless eyes looked on in polite mockery at the gimcrack gaiety.

'Arry wanted music with girls; Webster wanted some of that, but more of gambling, for he cherished the incurable hope of some day grabbing off a fortune by a run of luck. One of his hobbies was to figure up how much he would win if he let, say, four dollars ride seven times; or three dollars, or ten. He wasted much good paper scribbling on plans to beat the game.

Now when they went forth to enjoy themselves, Duke went with them, wherever they wished, unhurried, uninterested, spending money on expensive champagne with a carelessness that 'Arry had often wastefully tried to imitate. Duke did nothing but drink. He grew a little soggy, a trifle more deliberate in his movements, but that was all; he remained indifferent, polite, remote as a mummy at an Egyptian feast.

They had hardly got well under way before a blonde hooker trimmed 'Arry; but somewhere under his mongrel hide, 'Arry had a streak of the thoroughbred in him. He tried to pass his ill luck off with a careless gesture. He didn't squeal. He might have biffed her one on the ear if she hadn't vanished; but as it was he wiggled his ears and grinned.

A fat Chinaman with a long stick and pot of beans did much the same for Webster, who had begun with five dollars and doubled each losing bet; but he did not have enough to outlast the wallops that fan-tan took at him.

Then Duke took them to the rear of a saloon and emptied his pockets on table, dividing his money, dollar for dollar, into three piles.

"There," said Duke, leaning back in his chair as if he had paid a debt.

"Wot the bloomin' ——? Hi sye, wot's got the matter wiv yer 'ead?" demanded 'Arry, fingering the money as if he suspected there was something wrong with it.

"This ain't right," said Webster, pushing away his pile.

"No it hain't. Hif yer wasn't a good ship-mate Hi would pertend to borrow it. But Hi wouldn't never pye it back. Hi never pye nothink back."

"We can't take this, Duke. A dollar or two to eat on; but we have had our fun—and paid for it."

"All right. We'll give it all to the first beggar we meet. We are friends and shipmates, aren't we? And what one has the other has a right to. If you don't want it—well, we'll find some one who does."

They knew that he would fill up some blind man's cup and go on without a backward glance.

"Hi never gives nothink to a blasted begger. Heasy jobs they got. Settin' on their legs all day, doin' nuffin'. Been times Hi wished Hi was a bloomin' begger wiv a tin cup. Hout on the yard hoff the 'Orn—Them times Hi wished Hi was a begger's dog."

"Let's go to Dimity's," said Webster. "I'll shoot this pile there. Maybe we'll hit a lucky spot. We've tried beans. Now we'll rattle the bones."

So they went to Dimity's pool-hall in an alley off Pacific Street, and on back into a little room where a small man with a cane sat on a stool before a green baize table with raised sides.

They edged in among the players, and when the dice came to Webster he laid down some twenty dollars. The gamblers went after his coins as chickens scramble for a handful of grain. He was covered in a dozen seconds.

He rolled the bones, calling for a seven with heavy grunt and loud snap of finger and thumb. Up came box-cars.

"I'm through," said Webster and turned away.

"Me, Hi'm nex'," said 'Arry. "Hi'm lucky wiv the hivory."

"Come on, Harry. Let's spend your wad."

"Yer blasted lubber, yer loses yer wad. Hi got to win another un for yer."

"Call him off, Duke."

"No bloke calls me hoff! Hi'll ride these bones to victory. 'Ere, you blokes. Hi'm nex' wiv the bones. Climb hon board this. Hi'm going to die rich, Hi am, an' this is where Hi starts to 'ave my firs' sick spell. Hall set, heh? We're hoff! Zam—*snap!* Read 'em an' weep! 'Oly Judas— Snake's heyes! Hi'm through."

"Come on, let's go spend yours, Duke."

"What one tries, we all must try," said Duke.

When the dice came around again he picked them up and put his money to the table. The gamblers got aboard it with a rush.

"All set, are you?"

"Shoot!"

The dice tumbled across the cloth and clicked at the table's head, then settled back with eleven dots in the air.

"Shoot it all," said Duke as if it were forty pennies.

The money was covered with a rush.

With a slow underhand gesture he tossed the dice to the table, and a pair of deuces lifted their heads.

"All right, Little Joe. Kindly accommodate," said Duke, looking over his shoulder at nothing in particular as he threw, indifferently.

He threw a dozen times, showing less interest in the casts than any of the onlookers.

Webster, a reckless roistering man, watched with nervous tense gaze. 'Arry talked to the bones with persuasive coaxing:

"Come hon, you bones. Show a trayhace, a double deuce. We got to heat, you bones. Don't be no belly-robber, bones—like a —— ship steward. Hup wiv Joeboy, bones. 'Eave ho! Ah-h-h-h *come*, you Joe-boy. Ha-hi, that's 'ittin' 'em, bones!"

A tray and ace looked at the ceiling.

"Any or all," said Duke carelessly, dusting from his arm the cigar-ash that had fallen from the player beside him.

The little man with the cane reached out and took percentage for the house. Money fell to cover the winnings. Duke spun the dice and a seven winked at him.

Grumbling comment bubbled up from luckless players.

"This guy's right," said one.

"He wears a horse-shoe in his sock," said another.

"Take what you want of it. This will be your last chance to get back your money," said Duke without so much as glance at the

pile of silver, with a glint of gold in it, that the little man with the cane had scooped to one side and was apportioning out as money fell for bets.

"This guy can't go on forever," said a man throwing down a large gold piece.

Large stakes were not usual at Dimity's. It wasn't any Monte Carlo. Fifty dollars at one shot was just about as much as ever got to the green cloth even on Saturday nights.

"They don't want this," said the little man with the cane as he shoved a half-dozen dollars closer to Duke.

"All set?"

"Shoot!"

"Empty your mit—roll 'em!"

Up came an eight spot, and the next throw a seven showed.

Duke picked up the six dollars in front of him, dropped them into his pocket, and with no word or sign of annoyance, turned to his friends:

"All right. Let us eat."

"You're right. An empty stomach is full of darkness," said Webster.

"An' hafter that we can go down an' sign hon the blasted —— *Gryce Murdock*. 'Ave a fittin' end to this spree, that would be Hi'm thinkin'."

The *Grace Murdock*, notorious on the seven seas as a Yankee mankiller, lay out in the bay waiting for the runners to shanghai men on board to take her out. No sailor in his senses would sign on with Captain Poole and his bluenosed mates.

"And they say he used to be a gentleman," said Duke.

"Yes, and 'e carries wiv 'im a bag of gold to give to the bloke wot can tell 'im where the blighter is that stole 'is wife."

"Ought to give it to the blighter for stealing her, I say," announced Webster.

"Did you know her?" asked Duke.

"No, I didn't know her. An' what kind of a woman is it that being a skipper's wife will run away with a guy out o' the forecastle? She's not worth the five hundred dollars they say Poole keeps in a sack waiting for somebody to tell him where to find the sailor. And that's why Poole's a terror on seamen now. He never forgets that one of them stole his wife. That was six or seven years ago. And she took all the money out of the ship's safe. It wasn't much they say, two or three thousand. But that's why Toland, or Boland, or whatever his name—something like that—ran away with her."

"Hi'd like to biff 'im one hon the beak!" said 'Arry, full of indignation. "Makin' it 'ard for sailormen as get shanghaied on the *Gryce Murdock!*"

"A man that will let a woman break up his life isn't much of man," Duke declared with morose deliberation.

'Arry and Webster both felt that he was talking about himself.

They went to one of those famous French restaurants, which have vanished from the face of the earth, where fifty cents brought out enough to fill a lean sailorman, and a millionaire with five dollars farther up-town would not have had better fare.

"Bli' me, it'll be another year fore we 'as this much to heat again," said 'Arry. Then he poured the last of the claret down his pipe-stem of a throat. "A shame Hi calls it, Hi do. We 'aven't got even enough for a souse. An' ten months to sea—ow! Nex' time Hi'll get drunk firs'. No more of them Turk baths for little 'Arry. That's wot done it. Hi feels so clean Hi 'ated to go get myself mussed up! Wot's the bloomin' good of life any'ow?" he demanded bitterly, rolling a cigaret and pausing to dab the end of it with his tongue.

"No good, Harry, no good at all," said Duke, regarding him with a sad-eyed stare while his long fingers played with a tall glass full of green liquor. "Some waste themselves, like you, on women. Dick here goes to gambling. I—well, this."

He drew back his head a little and pointed at the absinthe.

"And all of us, the best of us, the worst of us, begin by crawling fretfully out of a womb, shriveled and helpless, wizened of face, toothless, no hair on the head; and in the end we go crawling back to the womb-like grave, glad of the chance to rest forever and a day. Life is like that, it uses a man up and throws him to the worms."

"Serves the brute right for being born," said Webster.

"Can't 'elp ourselves. Hi blasted well wouldn't 'ave got borned if Hi could 'ave 'elped it. Wot Hi get out of life? Ten months of ——, —— bloomin' ——, an' a French girl wiv a blonde wig gets it hall!"

Duke drank his absinthe, paid the bill, tipped the waiter with a casual superiority that 'Arry nor Webster, try as they might, could never attain over waiters, then they

went out and began wandering the streets. They had a rather subdued air, dropping in here and there for an inexpensive drink and a bite of free lunch, pausing near the entrance of a dance-hall, loitering before theater placards, walking along with moody inattentiveness, as if meditating on their past follies.

There was no snap and cheer-o feeling among them. Rotgut went down with no more effect than a shudder at the swallow, then lay cold and heavy in their stomachs.

Fog came in and lay its ghostly shadow over the city, increasing the chill in their bones.

At last they drifted into the Anchor Chain, a cellar joint, an all-night dump, with girls and a piano; a regular spider's trap for sailors; and more than one lad had gone to sleep with his head on a table there and awakened outside the Golden Gate, bound for —— knew where.

Here it was, with a nickel in each of their pockets, they sat and stared at the pool of spilled beer where flies that should have been asleep in dark corners were wading about up to their eyes in the stuff that puts good men on the bum.

"Well," said Webster in a half-shamed confidential tone, "I'm through with dice, cards and beans. We had near five hundred bones between us, and now—just threw it away."

"We might 'ave took our ease for two month, just loafed round wiv nothink to do. No girl hever sees the color of my money hagain!"

"Why," said Duke, "five hundred dollars at good six per cent. is thirty dollars a year. If we saved our money and pooled it, in a few voyages we could have a little chicken ranch with cows and roses. It's drink that makes a fool of men. That '79 champagne we begun on at Touser's was very fine, but at six dollars a pint bottle—I should have known better. And I came near ordering a case sent up to our room."

"Wot bloomin' room?" demanded 'Arry sarcastically.

"The one we didn't get," said Webster, "because we didn't know where we'd want to sleep when night came."

"You can sleep anywhere," said Duke with soft-spoken bitterness, "if you get drunk enough."

"But 'ow the —— can three blokes wiv steam-boiler stomachs get drunk hon wot we've got?"

"And if we had more," said Webster, "I'd be in favor of banking it toward a chicken ranch. I'm through going to sea for saloon-keepers and gamblers."

"Hi wouldn't give it to no French blonde," said 'Arry. Then with great resolution and firmness: "No hother blonde neither, Hi wouldn't!"

"And once again," said Duke, "I see the folly of wasting your substance in liquor—particularly in good liquor."

"Bad gives yer jus' as much of an 'eadhache!"

JOE LANE, the proprietor of the Anchor Chain, came down the stairs and into his joint with the air of a man who is proud of himself and knows how to get along in the world.

He had not been in San Francisco long, some three or four years; but he had begun to cast quite a shadow in the underworld, and had built up something of a name for himself as a sailor-robber.

Lane was a well-built man with a slight stomachic swelling from too much beer and loafing; but the size and set of him was pretty muscular.

That black mustache of his with its crimped upward curl, each end tight as a pug dog's tail, made it appear that he even had political ambitions. He had three or four gold teeth where the glint would show when he moved his lips, which were rather thick and full; and his hair was kinky, as if his grandmother had been hit with a tar brush.

On both hands he wore large stones that looked like diamonds; there was another of these in his tie pin. A thick linked gold chain was stretched across his belly, and from this a gem-set anchor dangled.

In a flashy sort of way he was quite a dandy; it was said that many fair maids of the dance-hall caste had lost their heads over him; and that a woman or two of even higher position had thrown herself at him.

He had not been in the saloon many minutes before a girl in red stockings, short dress, and a row of spangles around her neck came to the table where the three sailors sat, and said quickly to Duke:

"Look out for Lane. He pipes you boys are sailors and means to give you the k.o. drops. I'm wising you up because I hate him. I don't work here no more after tonight. Buy me a drink, won't you?"

"Bli' me if that ain't luck for yer! 'Ere we—yer tell 'er Duke. It's too sad for my words."

"My friends," said Duke, "and I are unfortunate in not being able to show our gratitude even to that small extent. We have the price of three beers—you are welcome to all three of those beers."

"On the square?" demanded the girl.

"Cross our 'eart an' 'ope to die," said Arry.

The delectable maiden glanced toward the diminutive 'Arry and smiled in a way that set his ears to waggling.

"Well I don't care," she said. "For myself, I mean. I thought I'd tip you off. I'm glad I did. Lane shanghaied a kid here last week with a two-year roll on him—was going home and quit the sea. Lane stole the roll. Never even split with the girl that got him to take the drink!"

"What ship does your illustrious proprietor intend us for?" asked Duke.

"The *Grace Murdock*. I heard him talking to one of his runners. I thought you boys would spend some money, seeing I tipped you off, but I don't care—I hate Lane. This is my last night here. Hones', can't you give me just one drink?"

"If it's just a drink you want," said Duke, "I'll do the best I can for you." He pulled a pint bottle of champagne from his trousers pocket. "I was saving this to take the taste out of my mouth in the morning. But if you don't want to drink it, the bartender will give you a dollar or two."

She reached out greedily.

"Oh champagne! I just love it!"

She flashed a smile with a glance at each, but a longer, more lingering look remained on Duke who did not notice. Then she left, for a dance-hall girl can't loaf with pikers.

" 'Oly Judas," said 'Arry to Duke, "but she gave yer the wishful heye. If Hi 'ad yer looks, Hi'd be a bigamist, Hi would!"

"And the irony of it is," said Duke moodily, "that she would prefer a little sweetened vinegar to that '79."

"Six bones a bottle—that'll sweeten it for her," said Webster. "Wish we had them six bones. Six straight passes, let 'em ride all the way, and that would be ——"

He began counting on his fingers.

A shadow fell on the table. The proprietor had stepped under the gas-jet and now greeted them cherrily:

"Well, mates, how are you? What's the matter—three handsome fellows and no girls. I'll call up——"

Duke raised his palm, waving aside the suggestion.

"We're broke" said Webster, with a half-challenging air.

"We made bad hinvestments, wery bad we 'ave!"

"Well you boys have come to the right place to be welcome whether you're light ballasted or loaded to the scuppers," said Joe Lane heartily, yanking a chair into position and sitting down. "I used to be a sailor—was a sailor for years. Saved up my money and started in business. Opened up in N'Orleans first, then came here. When I started in business I said to myself, 'Joe,' I said, 'Joe, you must give all sailors a hearty welcome, whether they're stranded or high and flush.' Every sailor is welcome wherever I am! Yes sir! What ship you boys off of?"

They talked for a time, tossing the sea spray about. Duke was moodily inattentive; but Webster and 'Arry kept the names of ships and skippers in the air, and Joe Lane did know the language of the sea. But no one mentioned Poole or named the *Grace Murdock*.

Then Joe Lane suggested that they go to a back room where they could talk over old times more privately, and have a drink or two. His excuse was pretty thin for it was on the far side of midnight, and business was quiet, though the colored man beat the keys with a great effort to appear jubilant.

The three sailors followed Lane, and they saw the significant stares of a girl or two who knew that another batch of sailors was about to be drugged and carted off like bad merchandise.

They were shown to the door of a little prison cell of a room which was almost filled by a round table—with a slot in the center —and a half-dozen chairs. It was a room set aside to accommodate poker-parties. A room where high words and hard blows might be exchanged without being heard in the saloon, and being close to the alley one might leave quickly without being seen.

"Just a minute, I'll bring something to drink," said Lane, ushering them through the door.

He closed it on them and went away.

"Wot the bloomin' —— we come 'ere for? Hi don't want none hof 'is drinks Hi don't."

"I'm cured," said Webster, poking his little finger into the table's slot. "The very sight of a gambling device fills me with disgust."

"Let this be a lesson in sobriety," said Duke sadly. "If we were drinking men we would be shanghaied. The villain means to poison us."

"Let's break 'is 'ead for 'im!"

"I'm for wrecking the joint," said Webster with grinning eagerness. "The three of us can put on some show."

"Both worthy suggestions," said Duke, but listen——"

He had barely finished outlining what he thought was a better plan when Joe Lane returned, bearing a small tray with four filled whisky glasses. He wasn't taking any chances on letting them have their pick, and placing the tray on the table instantly removed a glass for himself; and he kept it between his fingers as he sat down.

It was unsociable of him not to have brought a bottle, but his beggar guests pretended not to notice.

"Well, here's how," said Joe Lane, and each man lifted his glass.

Lane tossed off his whisky, then asked in blank mystification—

"Why, what's the matter?" for each of the sailors had replaced his glass on the table, setting it well in front of Lane.

"Whisky gives me a bloomin' 'eadache."

"I've quit takin' chances," said Webster. "I don't know of a bigger chance than going up against waterfront booze."

"And I," said Duke, "I only a few hours ago recognized the evils of intemperance. So with great resolution I now decline this beauteous liquor which appears to reflect the very fires of hell."

"What's the matter with you guys? Have you gone nuts?" cried Joe Lane, staring from face to face as a look of uneasiness gathered in his eyes.

"We don't drink wiv no sailor-robber, we don't!"

"When we want poison," said Webster, "we go to a drug-store and say it's for rats."

"Our suspicions incline us toward the opinion that there is a flavor of chloral in this liquor," said Duke.

Joe Lane laughed uneasily, but he laughed as best he could, heavily with muscular grimace of face.

"That's a joke. Ho-ho-ho! Suspicious of me, Joe Lane, the sailors' friend! Wait a minute, I'll go bring the bottle—let you pour your own."

He arose with the evident idea of leaving quickly, but Webster arose too, and blocked his way to the door.

"Set down," shouted 'Arry at Lane, "Set down or Hi'll set on yer neck!"

"Be seated," said Duke, "and have a drink with us. We are too impoverished to buy, so the best that we can do is to share. Take your choice."

"This is a —— of a way to treat a fellow that's treatin' you right!" shouted Joe Lane, getting indignant.

"Drink!" said Webster, hardening his face and drawing a man-sized fist into view.

"Drink!" ordered 'Arry, standing up and leaning his diminutive body on the table as he thrust forward his thin face with its bird-like nose.

"Drink!" said Duke with a hospitable gesture toward the three glasses.

"I'll be —— first! No man can make me do what I don't want. I wouldn't drink with you bums——"

"You meant to put us on board the worst heller in the Pacific."

"Yer robbed a poor young 'un larst week——"

"You've sent many a good mate to a man-killer, an' gobbled his advance. An' now," said Webster, "you're going to drink one o' them glasses, or I'll put you to sleep with this—*see?*"

He raised his fist to within three inches of Joe Lane's nose.

"Now—now listen fellows," said Joe Lane anxiously. "I don't want any trouble. You know I don't want any trouble. We were talking over ships and things like old mates. You boys don't think I would do you dirt? You don't think that of me? That's what a man gets for having a heart! I was trying to do the right thing by you—when you were broke. I used to be a sailor. I know the life. Why, you—you bums, get out of my place!"

"Drink!" said Duke.

"Let me out! You get out! Let me out!"

"If you want out, mister," said Webster, "you just walk over me. Go on. Try it. You said you wanted out. Go on, get out."

"Or come round this way," said 'Arry. "It's shorter. Just yer try it and Hi'll bite a leg off yer!"

Joe Lane reached into his pocket and brought out a wad of bills.

"How much do you boys want? You're broke. What do you say to a tenner apiece?"

"Nuffin," said 'Arry. "We don't sye nuffin."

"Our justice isn't for sale," Duke answered calmly.

"Justice? What do you mean? Justice?"

"You guessed it," Webster declared, grinning. "*Justice!*"

"What do you mean?" Joe Lane asked, hastily looking from face to face.

It was Duke that answered with—

"It is justice to make a man that uses knock-out drops drink his own liquor!"

Lane forced a mocking laugh.

"Ho-ho-ho! Knock out drops! You are crazy. What do you mean, saying that I, *I* would do a thing like that! I have been a sailor—that's what you get for trying to be friendly and good-hearted. I'll never give another sailor a drink as long as I live. Drink, ——!"

And with an indignant swipe, Joe Lane at one blow swept the three glasses from the table.

"Knock-out drops!" he cried, loudly, scornfully, triumphantly. "Now what are you going to do about it? Knock-out——"

"You call it!" Webster interrupted, and his large hard fist touched Joe Lane on the point of the jaw as a pile-driver touches a pier-head; and he dropped as a sailor drops when he has swallowed a double dose of chloral.

"Put hus on the *Gryce Murdock* would yer!" said 'Arry, wrinkling his nose and waggling his ears at the same time, which revealed a state of high excitement.

"Glad there's a fog," said Webster, grinning broadly.

"But it would have been more like justice," Duke said, "if we had made him drink of his own liquor—though the effect is much the same, much the same. You have a jaw-break wallop, Dick. Some day you'll break your own knuckles."

" 'Ow habout them sparklers?"

"Let them be, Harry my son. He will undoubtedly be robbed—but our justice stops short of that."

"We are following the Golden Rule, Harry," said Webster, explaining the matter. There was a serious note in his deep voice. "We are following the Golden Rule. We're doin' unto others as he tried to do unto us. And he didn't try to rob us of no diamonds or anything like that, understand? He just tried to knock us out an'——"

'Arry nodded rather doubtfully. The point was clear enough, but the logic seemed unnecessary.

"There's stairs back here that come out in the alley," said Duke who had stepped from the small room for a minute to take a look. "And the fog's thick as blotting-paper. We can get away easy. Let's be off."

A ROWBOAT was creeping about in the foggy dawn out on the bay; and if a stranger had been peering over the gunwales he could hardly have helped thinking that murder was about to be done, murder and robbery.

A rather large well-dressed man lay bound face up across a thwart, while three fellows crouched about him, and one held a small sharp-bladed knife; another pulled at the rings on the man's hands, and the third was removing the pin from the red necktie. The man's hands were tied, his mouth was gagged. He squirmed and gulped, making sounds like a mute who is greatly excited.

"It's a shame Hi sye, that the begger gets to keep 'is sparklers."

"We ain't pirates. We're doin' what's right. Now you start in, Duke. I've tucked his jewelry in his coat pocket, out o' sight. You start in on him."

Duke knew that even a heedless captain like Poole might draw back from shanghaiing a person important enough to wear curled mustaches; and now he began to cut away the lip ornament. The knife was sharp, but it pulled nevertheless. He was not trying to make a barber's job of it. An uneven bristle remained.

They then removed his white collar and red tie; they rumpled his hair, turned up his coat collar, splashed a little salt water on his clothes to take out their neatness, and shortly had him looking something like a waterfront bum.

Duke, in spite of the cold fog, and the prowling and stumbling about on wharves, looking for some caretaker's boat to steal, had begun to be cheerful, and take a joyful interest in life.

And as they sat waiting for the rapidly rising fog to clear they discussed Lane and

his plight, and where he was going. The bound figure showed symptoms of desperate animation; it seemed extremely eager to attract attention, but the merciless ruffians merely grinned and appeared otherwise unaware of the gurgling and writhing.

The fog was thinning and lifting. The *click-clank* of a capstan came through the still gray air, and they, having known about where to find the *Grace Murdock* could now make out the ghostly figure of a ship's spars and rigging near by.

"That's her. Pullin' up her mud-hook too. Goin' out as soon as a tug can see to give her a pull, I bet," said Webster who took the oars and began to send the boat through the choppy blue-black water.

"Ahoy there!" Duke shouted.

" 'Hoy yerself!" a rough voice answered from over the rail.

"We've got a runaway sailor here. Do you want him?"

"Do we want him! We'd take a sack o' sawdust an' call it a sailor—we need fo'csle meat that bad. Be about as much good as them we got"—the fellow glanced inboard with a menacing scowl. "But wait my beauties, you'll be sailormen yet, or there'll be burials at sea a-fore we see N'York!"

"He didn't want to come," said Duke, "so we used inducements."

Webster and 'Arry were busy removing the gag and bindings.

And the first thing Lane did was to shout:

"I won't go on there—don't for God's sake, don't—I'll give each of you a thousand—don't—two thousand—they'll kill me—they'll kill me——"

"Wot the —— yer think they would 'ave done to hus? Yer didn't show no hexcitement then?"

"Yes," yelled the black mate, glaring down, "that's one of the fellers that jumped ship. We particular want him."

The mate would have sworn to a deserter if it had been the King of Spain.

"Ow," shrieked the unhappy Lane, "don't put me on that heller!"

"See," said the black mate with grim humor. "See, he's been here before. He knows us."

"I'll give a thousand to each of you—two thousand——"

"Shut hup," snarled 'Arry. "We ain't no pirates. Hi wish to 'eaven we was. Bli' me Hi do!"

"Get him on deck," said the mate. "This ain't our mornin' to solger. That tug'll be along here."

"Throw over a line an' run him up," said Duke. "He's too weak to climb. Drank too much whisky in a place called the Anchor Chain."

A rope end fell from the ship's deck.

Lane howled and fought, but he was in the hands of fellows that were neither weak nor gentle; and he suffered. There was a great commotion in the boat, for Lane fought desperately. He cried out that he was Lane, the owner of the Anchor Chain—a man of importance—and the police, the consuls, the Government would hear of it.

The black-visaged mate looked down and smiled a broken-toothed smile or two as he watched the men scrambling themselves in the rowboat below.

The commotion brought forth a tall gaunt-faced man, with deep-set eyes and a short square-cut beard. He came on the poop and gazed over the rail.

"What is this, Mr. Groggins? What is this?"

"Returning one of our old sailors, sir," said the mate.

"What's his name, Mr. Groggins?"

"Calls hisself Joe Lane, sir. Says he's a millionaire."

The gaunt-faced Captain Poole came slowly to the starboard ladder and peered steadily over the side.

"Here you farmers, tail on to this line. Up with him," shouted the mate.

Sailors came with a jump and began hauling Joe Lane up in much the same way that they would have yanked up a barrel of flour if the windlass wasn't working.

Kicking and clawing at the side of the ship, he was heaved up and dumped over the rail, on the deck, spilled out, sprawled out like a busted sack of spuds.

"Gosh a-mighty, it *is* Joe Lane!" cried one of the sharp-eyed sailors who had recognized the proprietor of the Anchor Chain.

"There's goin' a-be a burial at sea, *soon*," said Groggins, his savage eyes on the sailor who had unluckily made the identification.

There weren't many things in this world at which Black Mike Groggins hesitated. He had been with Poole five or six years and liked the "old man's" way of doing things; but Groggins knew that there was danger in shanghaiing a man of underworld distinction. The fellow might make trouble when he reached shore; particularly when

he had been recognized by the crew, who, as these skulking farmers liked to do, would hasten to testify against the ship and say that he had been brought on board against his will, and when the officers knew his identity.

So Mr. Groggins, after swearing fiercely at the sailor who had recognized Joe Lane, now played what he thought under the circumstances was a trump card.

Lane lay without moving, an arm about his face, hiding it as if from expected blows.

Groggins bent over, pulled the arm away, took a long look at Lane's face, then shouted down at the sailors in the rowboat:

"I never saw this man before. He's no runaway from this ship. You fellows are trying to get the *Grace Murdock* into trouble, I bet. Take this man away with you, an' do it —— quick. An' if I had you rattle-kneed bums up on this deck I'd teach you to play tricks. I would that! Over with him—over with——"

The tall, broad, gaunt-faced Captain Poole had come down the ladder and stopped beside the mate.

"No, Mr. Groggins. You are wrong. We keep this man—this runaway sailor. What does he call himself—Joe Lane? Ah, yes, Joe Lane. He's changed his name a little. We need men. Send him forward!"

Mr. Groggins was ever ready to carry out the "old man's" orders; and if the "old man" wanted to take a chance with the owner of property and a pull, well and good. Mr. Groggins planted a number twelve foot against Lane's posterior, at the same time requesting him to arise and walk, and be —— quick about it.

Some of the sailors cheered. They gave little jubilant shouts before they realized what they were doing and where they were. They knew Groggins for a devil-driver, and hated him; but they hated Lane far more, Lane and his kind. So three or four little gay whoops went up—then a sudden awkward silence.

It had been many a long long year since a jubilant sound had been heard on the deck of the *Grace Murdock*, which, so it happened, was the maiden name of Poole's runaway wife, but with a sort of savage perverseness he would not have the ship renamed.

Now Poole looked about him at the sailors with an almost mystified stare; and they were a bit uneasy, for they didn't understand the look that he had in his deep-set eyes, and they felt almost guilty at having cheered on this mad-house.

"Go forward men," Captain Poole said quietly. "Go forward to your work. And if you show good spirit and a will, this will be an easy voyage, a pleasant voyage—for some of you."

Mr. Groggins was so amazed at hearing the "old man" say anything about a pleasant voyage that he appeared to be paralyzed from the neck down, and for a moment twisted his head around on motionless shoulders, to have a long look at his captain's face and see what were the outcropping marks of lunacy to correspond with those words.

Captain Poole, thrusting himself half-over the rail and speaking to the three men in the boat who were shoving off, said:

"Wait, you men wait a minute. Wait right there."

He then disappeared through the door leading from the quarterdeck into the cabin, and soon returned.

"Stand from under," he sang out with a sort of creaking cheerfulness, and as the three heads below dodged out of the way, something hit the bottom of the rowboat with a thud.

" 'Oly Judas," cried 'Arry, who was the first to get to it, and felt its weight and the shape of its contents. " 'Oly Judas—it's a sack of gold!"

"Gold?" said Duke, incredulous, holding out his hand to get some assurance.

"Oh ho!" shouted Webster. "Joe Lane—Joland—that was him, I bet! An' five hundred dollars—we're rich again!"

Duke settled himself contentedly to the oars, and gazing off with the light of anticipation in his dark eyes, remarked—

"This time we'll get our room first, so we will have it; and I'll have a case of that champagne sent up, with a wash-tub full of ice and——"

"Yer know, Hi nearly passed hup that French blonde for a little yeller-'eaded Henglish girl Hi saw there. Hi bet she would treat a bloke right. Hi'll find out pretty soon, Hi will."

Webster was studiously touching the tips of his left hand with the forefinger of his right, and saying aloud but largely to himself—

"Now that our luck's turned—a hundred an' fifty—let her ride three times and that's—once is three hundred—twice is six hundred—three times will be——"

A TOUCH OF FEVER

by John Scarry

Author of "Partners"

HARRY STOVER had his Eurasian foreman on the carpet. He was holding forth in guttural Dutch when Jim Randall arrived. The two Americans were cocoanut planters and close friends. Save for the final payments they had clear title to their concessions on Flower Island, a coral strip which nestles against the coast of Java opposite Pachitan.

"Hi, Larry!" said Jim.

"Hello, Jim!" said Larry. "Sit down. Have a drink. Boy!" he shouted toward the rear of the bungalow. "Whisky-soda *loro!*"

Jim shook his head. "I don't want a drink."

Larry's eyebrows lifted, but he said nothing. He never talked freely, and just at present he had Piet Baning on his hands. Leaving Jim to his own devices, he turned again to the half-caste who stood silent and sullen near the veranda railing.

Randall kicked back a big wicker chair, dropped into it and raised his heels to Stover's desk. His repose was of short duration. Within ten seconds something urged him once more to his feet; set him pacing restlessly up and down. He was an alert, energetic young fellow, long and lean and sandy, with a humorous gleam in his wide gray eyes. But for all his energy, there was now a certain air of weariness about him.

A native servant appeared with bottles and glasses. Jim did not take a drink; he waved the servant out of his path. Breaking off his restricted marathon, he presently succumbed to his impatience and interrupted Larry.

"Larry," he began abruptly. "Our last payments are due tomorrow. I'll paddle across to Pachitan in the morning. If you give me your two thousand tonight I can start early, straight from my landing."

Stover swung around in his chair. There was little grace in his thick-set figure. He was broader and heavier and darker complexioned than Randall. Although not much older, his eyes revealed experience beyond his years. Life had led him into far places, among all kinds and conditions of men. His manner was quietly reserved. Yet when he smiled—as he did now, slowly—the serious contours vanished from his face.

"How'd you get dressed so soon?" he asked mockingly.

"Knocked off at four o'clock," Jim explained. "I was feeling a bit under the weather."

Larry's smile broadened.

"You're acting about normal," he remarked, "except that you refused a drink. Hold your horses, Jimmie boy!" And with that he swung back to the foreman.

"My mind is made up, Baning," he said, resuming Dutch. "I am going to let you go. You refuse to learn that I will not have my coolies mistreated, so I shall have to find some one else. I have given you three chances. This is the end."

Baning was a swarthy individual, of medium height but powerfully put together. Small, evil eyes shifted constantly under his black brows. His countenance was not prepossessing. He shrugged, and growled his reply:

"Very well, *mynheer*. Give me my money."

Larry paid the man a couple of hundred guilders and nodded dismissal. The half-caste started at once toward the steps; but suddenly halted.

"May I stay here over night?" he asked with an attempt at politeness. "I am going to my home in Bandjar, and the last train has left Pachitan. If I cross to the city now, I shall have a hotel bill to pay."

"Stay if you like," said Larry pleasantly. "You can have a coolie set you across in the morning. Good luck to you!"

"Thank you, *mynheer*."

The foreman left the bungalow and passed through a sort of compound to a smaller house which overlooked the beach. Once more Larry faced around to Jim Randall.

"Now then, James; what's bothering Old Impetuosity? Last payments, eh? Well, I've got mine ready—two thousand guilders. Isn't it great to be all cleaned up?"

Jim sat down. He took off his sun-helmet, running his hand over a shock of curly red hair.

"Gosh!" he cried. "After five years with our noses right to the old grindstone. I'd never have made it if it hadn't been for you, Larry."

"Oh, ——!" said Stover deprecatingly. "You'd have stuck all right."

"Maybe," Jim conceded; "but I doubt it. Anyway, I'm mighty grateful."

"Forget it."

"Want me to make your payment?"

"Well," Larry considered, "one of us has got to go across. If you can make it, Jim, it'll help me a lot. I'll be busier than forty small gray monkeys with Baning gone."

Randall stood up again, moving his shoulders nervously, as if to throw off a burden.

"Give me your two thousand!"

"Sit down, man!" Larry commanded. "What's your hurry? We'll have a drink before you go. There ought to be that much celebration coming to us."

"No, Larry; nothing doing," Randall declined positively. "No festivities to-night. I'm going to shoot some quinine into me and go to bed."

Stover was immediately solicitous.

"Bad as that, Jimmie? Then you'd better lie up tomorrow. I can make the payments. It's a pretty tough paddle to Pachitan unless you're feeling right."

"Oh, Lord, no!" Jim protested. "Nothing but a low fever. I'll be fit as a fiddle in the morning. And the trip across'll be a good vacation—change of scene. Hand over that money now. I've been out long enough in this evening air."

Stover surveyed the younger man keenly.

"Want to be careful, Jim," he cautioned. "There's a lot of fever now that the rains have started. I was talking with Ward at the club last Saturday. He was telling me that Standish went completely off his chump with it for two days. Raving. He thought he was home in England."

"Mine's not that kind. I wish it was. I'd put up with anything for a glimpse of Broadway."

They both laughed; and Stover unlocked a drawer in his desk, bringing forth a thin packet of East Indian bills. These he counted.

"Two thousand! Take good care of it, Jim. I had to scratch some to get it together."

"Huh! Don't worry. Drop over for tiffin tomorrow and I'll tell you what I did with it. Say; that half-caste doesn't understand English, does he?"

Stover flashed a quick glance.

"Darned if I know," he declared. "He was here only a month. I never tried it on him. Why? You're not thinking he'd try to hold you up?"

"He'd better not. I pack a gun. ——! This malaria's no joke."

"Sure you can make it tomorrow?"

"Oh, sure! A night's sleep'll fix me." Jim moved toward the veranda steps.

"Got quinine at home?" Larry called after him. "Mine's finished."

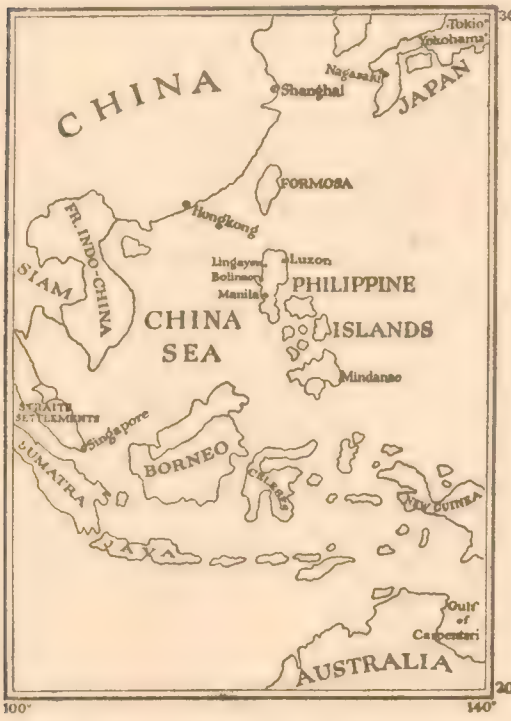
"Plenty. So long, Larry."

Stover stood up to watch Randall's long strides take him out of sight in the gathering darkness along the beach; then

he turned and bent over the plantation accounts which littered his desk.

THE next morning Larry found himself with two men's work on his hands. Plantation routine held him busy until past noon.

Before cleaning up Larry took a few minutes to look over the foreman's bungalow. It was deserted and in fairly respectable condition—fit for a new occupant.



Baning had not been untidy at any rate. Larry supposed that the half-caste had got away in time to catch the seven-o'clock train north from Pachitan.

It occurred to him presently, with a slight twinge of something akin to conscience, that he had given small thought to Jim's illness or Jim's errand. So, after imparting a few instructions to his coolie-bosses, he hurried to his bungalow.

Under the shower-bath he assured himself there was no reason for uneasiness. Jim was all right. He would have sent his boy, or the boy would have come of his own accord, if anything had been amiss. Nevertheless Larry raced into fresh khaki. He was tied to the younger man with bonds of real affection; and besides, perhaps Jim had not been able to make their payments.

As soon as Larry arrived at the other plantation he knew that Jim had not been across to Pachitan. Haggard and unshaven, clad in a rumpled sleeping-suit, Jim was stretched on a wicker divan at one end of the bungalow veranda. His malaria had laid him by the heels.

Larry gruffly ordered him into bed. And before he understood the seriousness of Jim's illness he asked that the money for the payments be handed over. There was still time to paddle across the strait.

This request aroused Jim tremendously. Indeed, its effect on him was the effect of a red rag on a bull. He snapped himself into a sitting position and lashed out bitterly. Larry listened in complete amazement to a hot flow of vituperation.

"Why, you're sick!" he exclaimed. "You ought to be in bed!"

"Sure!" flashed the sneering reply. "You'd like that. Oh, I know your dirty game! Four thousand guilders! Want to clean me out, eh? Well, you won't. My money's hidden where you'll never find it. You can't rob me, you —— crook!"

"Jim!" was shocked from Larry's lips. "What in the world ails you?"

"Nothing ails me!" cried Randall savagely. "I've got wise to you, that's all."

"Oh, pull yourself together, man!" expostulated Larry, now realizing that Jim's reason was unbalanced, but unable at once to adjust himself. "Rob you! Don't be foolish. You know what it's all about. Remember I gave you two thousand last night?"

Jim rose abruptly to his feet. His face was grim and purposeful. With quick steps he made his way to the bungalow door.

"Gave me two thousand!" he retorted scornfully. "Oh, you liar! And if you did, —— you, you owe me ten times that much for all the crooked deals you've put over on me. But I'll fix you."

It was plain that Jim's condition was not better than walking delirium. Mad illusions ran riot in the fevered brain—absurd illusions which pictured Jim's best friend as a conspiring enemy. Like Standish, who had thought he was in England! The derangement could be dangerous while it lasted—dangerous to all within reach.

Jim stumbled against the side of the door; he was reaching for something on a table inside. Larry, uttering an exclamation,

sprang forward. His advance was halted by a threatening flourish with a businesslike black automatic.

"Stay where you are, Stover!"

The flourish almost worked Jim's downfall. Only the back of a wicker chair saved him from pitching full length on the veranda floor. He steadied himself, snarling viciously. After the exertion his face now wore the flush of high temperature; his eyes burned with the glitter of insanity. But the parched hand that gripped the automatic did not waver.

Larry Stover's bewilderment had passed. He now spoke firmly, slowly, making a conscious effort to pierce the fog of delusion that immured the other.

"Put that gun away, Jim!"

"Stay where you are, Stover!" the hoarse command was repeated. "Another move and I'll drill you! I'm going to snuff you out anyway, but I want to tell you a few things first."

Whereupon Jim did tell a few things. His tirade was a line of preposterous accusations and abuse. Larry felt no anger, only anxiety. The situation was decidedly ticklish. That automatic might go off any second.

Moreover, Jim was in a bad way. It was suicidal for him to be up and about in his pajamas. He needed huge dosings of quinine and hot brandy. Most of all he needed to be in bed under thick blankets until his fever broke. And it was up to Larry to bring this to pass—quickly.

Larry was not unaccustomed to emergencies. With the speed of a striking snake he crouched and swung one ponderous leg. The chair that supported the sick man crashed against the railing on the opposite side. Randall fell headlong in the midst of his cursings.

Before he could twist himself into position to fire, Larry's big boot was crunching the pistol out of his clutching fingers. Presently it slid free. Larry picked it up and tossed it over the railing into the garden.

But the matter was not ended. Randall fought with mad frenzy. His long tough limbs flayed around like ends of wire rope. Bitterly, in silence save for the hissing of quick breaths and the creaking of the bamboo floor, the conflict raged from one end of the veranda to the other.

Larry was not brutal. Now that the pistol was out of the way he dared to take it easy. He tried for wrestlers' holds. Jim, however, tore and bit and scratched when the occasion offered. They broke apart, panting. Larry flung himself forward in a football tackle. He floored his adversary. Rolling to follow up his advantage, he was suddenly aware that Jim had gone limp.

"That helps," he grunted. "Blankets for you, old son!"

Ten minutes later he had Randall fastened loosely in bed. The burning tinder-dry body was wrapped in ten thicknesses of bathrobes, tweed clothing and blankets. Larry laid his hand on Jim's fevered forehead. "Suppose I ought to fetch a doctor," was his first thought.

Fetching a doctor meant a trip to Pachitan. Larry considered the situation. Very likely a doctor was not needed. Planters rarely availed themselves of such a luxury. If they had fever they suffered and shoveled in quinine. Larry had done so himself more than once. So had Jim. Still, malaria was treacherous; and Jim was in a bad way. Since doctors were at hand it would be criminal not to call one in.

And there were the payments to be made. That phase of the predicament, returning with suddenness, brought Larry up short. He had to find their money.

Jim's keys were on the washstand, where Larry had tossed them when he stripped off the unconscious man's pajamas. Followed a swift and rigorous search—a vain search. There were only two places to look—the desk and the tall teak wardrobe. The desk drawers were all unlocked; the wardrobe held two shelves of neatly piled clean khaki. Underneath was an orderly array of boots and shoes. Nowhere was anything that resembled four thousand guilders in Netherlands India bills.

"Might just as well be buried!" Larry growled.

Well, after all, the money was not vitally important—as long as it was safe. The payments could be made in a day or two, after Jim had come to his senses. The Resident in Pachitan was a good old Dutchman and would listen to any reasonable excuse.

But, Larry noticed, there was no quinine. An empty bottle stood stopperless on the washstand. Jim had evidently taken the last grains the night before. He needed another dose. He now lay motionless, apparently sleeping. No trace of perspiration

softened the tight skin of hands and brow and chest.

"Wish he'd start to sweat," was Larry's thought. "If he'd start to sweat, he'd be all right. Guess I'll slide over for Doc Vloten, anyway."

It occurred to him that he had seen nothing of Jim's house-boy. "Useless —— fool!" he muttered, and started out of the bungalow toward the outhouses in the rear. Glancing casually to the western sky, he saw the mounting black clouds that foretold a tropical shower.

"I'll get soaked," said Larry to himself. "It'll be raining in ten minutes."

Beside the kitchen hearth he found the servant, frightened by the unwonted fracas, skulking in fear and trembling. Larry dragged him by the ear to the sick man's room.

"Why did you not inform me that the master was ill?"

"I did, *Tuan!*" the boy quavered. "I told the *Tuan* Assistant—early this morning."

Larry muttered an oath. "Is that true?"

"True, *Tuan!*"

So the half-caste had known, and had departed without passing the word along. What a swine he was!

"I am going now for the *Tuan* Doctor. If you disobey me, or leave this room for a second, I shall tear your body into small pieces when I come back."

"Yes, *Tuan,*" timidly.

"I have tied the master so you can easily restrain him," Larry explained to the panic-stricken Javanese. "Should he wake, give no heed to his threats. If the sweating comes and his speech is sane, you may do what he commands. Otherwise do not remove so much as one covering; and hold the master in bed with all your force. Do you understand?"

"Yes, *Tuan,*" even more timidly than before.

Larry snorted his disgust. He was leaving Randall in charge of no very forceful nurse. But there was nothing else he could do. The Javanese was certainly not to be trusted to cross to Pachitan for the doctor.

"I'll take the gun along," said Larry to himself; "then nothing much can happen if he does get loose."

He found the pistol where it had fallen among the rose-bushes. Dropping down to Jim's canoe landing, the inspiration came to summon his own servant to reinforce Randall's. So Larry switched his plan. After sending his boy to Jim's place he would cross the strait in his own canoe. He set off at a jog along the beach.

ON HIS left Pachitan Strait lay narrow and sheltered; the farther shore peaceful under Larry's accustomed survey. Well to the west, beyond the zinc roofs of many warehouses, two big freighters were being loaded at the quay. Nearer at hand a native quarter was revealed by dull-brown patches in the yellow-green of banana gardens. Directly opposite the hurrying man rose the brick-and-plaster homes of the Europeans.

A minute later all this was blotted out, effaced, by a sudden downpour of rain. Drenching gray torrents hung like a continuous curtain over the leaden waters. Trees and bushes along Larry's path were almost hidden. Only the sand underfoot enabled him to hold his course.

Finally his shoulder struck against a bamboo upright of his canoe landing. Larry turned sharply to the right, bending his head to the cold assaults of the storm. The path to his bungalow ran ankle-deep. Reaching the veranda, he shook himself after the manner of a water-soaked mastiff.

"Boy!"

The boy came running. Larry took him by the elbow, quickly delivering his instructions and warnings. The Javanese stared dubiously at the storm; but he set off sturdily, his bare feet slipping and sliding in the mud until he struck the beach.

"A dry coat and a slicker for me," said Larry. "Then I'll see if I can find Pachitan."

Presently he stood in front of his wardrobe, pulling a slicker from under a pile of work-clothes. He heard a footstep; was aware of a darkening in the doorway. His arm went up to ward off a blow which he sensed rather than perceived—and all went black in front of him.

Some time later he opened his eyes. A throbbing headache tortured him. As his senses cleared he discovered that he was sitting on the woven bamboo floor of his bedroom, propped against an iron leg of his bed.

It was dark outside, but an oil-lamp was

burning on his washstand. Vaguely, he knew that it had stopped raining. Clothes, everything, had been snatched out of his wardrobe and flung carelessly on the floor. Gradually, Larry realized that his legs were bound together and fastened firmly to the floor-strips; that his wrists were tied behind his back to the support against which he was resting.

"Jim!" he breathed, almost wonderingly. "How'd he get here so quick? He'll kill himself!"

He was conscious, too, of swift dismay. Being captive to a madman was nothing to joke about—especially after having had a taste of what that madman could do.

Larry thrashed about in an effort to free himself. His struggles moved the bed and sent a tremor through the whole house; but did not effect his release. Instead, they brought a man hurriedly into the room.

"*Zool*" Larry heard. "You're awake. It is time."

Larry's surprize was overwhelming when he saw that this man was Baning, the discharged half-caste foreman. For a moment he could not speak. Baning brought a chair across the room and sat down facing his prisoner.

"You t'ink I go?" he sneered. "You t'ink I gannot talk de English? Ho!"

"What the —— do you want?" Larry demanded.

"Money—two t'ousand, may be four t'ousand. I gannot find him. Vere it is?"

"I haven't any money."

"Oh, yes!" the half-caste returned coolly. "Last night you gif him to Mynheer Randall. En dis morning de boy has told me dat Mynheer Randall is sick, so I go to his house. But Mynheer Randall keep avake all de time. I can do not'ing. Den you come, en I vatch everyt'ing. By en by you open de closet en de desk, so I come back here—en vait."

Larry cursed under his breath. His eyes flashed beyond the half-caste to the dark doorway.

"Yell, if you vill," said Baning composedly. "Dere is nobody to hear. You haf sent de boy avay."

All of which was unfortunately true. Larry felt that it must be close to three hours since he was knocked out. The coolies had quit work at sundown and were now in their barracks half a mile away over the nearest hill. And his boy was still farther away at Jim's place. Yelling would not help.

Larry's mind worked rapidly. The half-caste, building on Jim's impetuous opening the night before, had figured with cunning accuracy—up to a certain point. Naturally, he could not know that the money was still hidden in Jim's house. And it came to Larry that he must not find out.

"Vere it is?" Baning began.

"Look for it!"

"By ——, I haf looked! Dere is not'ing—only a pistol. Maybe I use de pistol. You tell me!" he cried in a swift access of fury. "I gannot vait. I need de money, en dere is somebody vaiting for me in Pachitan. I go far avay. So you vill tell me vere it is—de money!"

"Don't be a —— fool!" Larry flared in turn. "When I get out of this I'll hound you all over Java to pay you for that crack you gave me."

"*Zool* Den here is anodder, you —— *ploert!*" The half-caste rose part way from his chair, leaned forward and dealt Larry a powerful blow in the face. Larry's head rocked back against the corner of the bed.

"En you von't get avay!" came furiously. "You vill tell me vere is de money!"

"I'll tell you nothing, you swine!"

A second cowardly blow thudded against Larry's cheek.

"Tell me!" grated Baning.

Larry was silent, dizzy, choking with rage.

Suddenly the half-caste stood up. His frenzy seemed to die with the coming of cold determination. He spoke dispassionately. "I look for fife minutes," he announced. "After dat I shoot you!"

Then he left the room.

A succession of sharp noises came through the thin partitions. Larry knew that Baning was opening and closing cupboards and desk drawers. Analyzing the situation, he felt his case was desperate. There was no doubt in his mind that the half-caste would carry out his threat to shoot. Larry knew that breed!

If it had been a question of money alone, Larry would have told. He was not one to hold out until the end for the sake of a few thousand guilders. The years of his life to come were too rich in prospect. But—as matters stood, he could not tell. He could

not bring upon Jim Randall the mishandling he himself was getting. It would mean Jim's death. The boys— Pah! Baning would drive them away with a snap of his fingers.

In a surge of hopeless fury Larry tossed himself about, and battled with the ropes that bound him. But they were secure; they did not yield to his efforts.

"Coolie! Coolie!" he bellowed. And he called the coolie-bosses by name. "Mardjo! Karto! Sentot!"

There was no response from outside.

But the half-caste came back, his face dark with towering passion.

He leaped forward with the speed and animosity of a wounded panther.

"Vill you tell me? Vill you tell me? Vill you tell me?"

He screamed the questions; and screaming, he pounded Larry's face with all his strength.

Followed a curious interval of calm while Larry licked his puffed lips. Baning drew a pistol from his pocket—Randall's pistol, the bound man recognized for all his suffering—and presented it to Larry's head.

"Vill you tell me?"

"I'll tell you nothing!"

"All right. Den I shoot you—ven I gount ten. Now, vun—two—t'ree—"

There arose a commotion in the outer darkness—a sudden wild shouting coming nearer and nearer along the beach. The half-caste wheeled around with an oath.

"Stover, you dirty crook!" It was Randall's voice. "Come out here, Stover! I'll cut your heart out!"

Baning blew out the lamp.

"Yah!" taunted the voice. "Hide in the dark, you —— coward! I don't care! I'll get you just the same!"

Larry roused himself from the horror that gripped every fiber of his body. There was no light; but he was sure the half-caste, probably not understanding Jim's swift tirade, was lurking in the doorway. Larry's one thought was to keep Jim from crashing in to meet that loaded pistol.

"Don't come in, Jimmie!" he yelled at the top of his lungs.

"Oh, no!" the scornful retort rang from the steps. "Maybe I'll not! You just try out to get this knife the way you got my gun!"

Baning's pistol spoke once; then it spouted a solid stream of flame as Jim's demented rush clattered across the bamboo floor. Larry heard the two men come together. He wrenched and tore to escape from his bonds; strained every sinew in a vain attempt to free himself. The ropes cut him and blood trickled along his fingers. For two or three minutes the confusion of men wrestling filled the room—then all was still.

After a long moment came a muttering in the darkness. "Boy! Boy! Oh, ——, my head aches!"

It was Jim. The weary sanity of his voice, the fact that Jim could speak at all, brought an immeasurable surge of joy to Larry's heart.

"Jimmie!" he summoned hoarsely.

"Oh, hello! You here, Larry? I've got a touch of fever, I guess."

"Come over here, Jim. Bring your knife."

Jim stumbled across the room.

"Cut my hands loose!" Larry commanded.

Muttering, fumbling in the dark, Jim did as he was told.

"What's all this about?" he questioned querulously. "What you doing in my room—like this?"

His room! By that Larry knew that Jim's mind was a blank as to what had happened during the height of his illness. Then, suddenly, Jim collapsed.

Larry shoved away the limp body, carefully. He wondered if Jim was wounded. With fingers that trembled and yet were stiff, he groped for the knife that Jim had dropped. It was warm and wet to the touch; but he completed the work of freeing himself.

Hastily, Larry struggled to his feet. He lighted the lamp. The motionless body of the half-caste lay near the door. But that must wait. Jim was Larry's first concern. As he lifted Randall to the bed he noticed that perspiration had started. A swift anxious search revealed no sign of a bullet-wound.

Jim stirred.

"Larry," he murmured without opening his eyes. "I'm a bit under the weather. You'll have to make those payments. You'll find the four thousand in my left riding-boot."

"All right, old son!" said Larry as he turned to look for blankets. "You go to sleep now."

THE INTARSIA BOX*

A Complete Novelette by

Henry S. Whitehead

CHARLES REVERE PINCKNEY 3d entered the Public Garden from Boylston Street under the yellow-green of budding trees in the watery sunlight of an April noon. Workmen were wearily scraping the Winter's accumulation of mud from the bottom of the shallow pond where later in the season swan-boats would glide urbanely in long curves, carrying excited youngsters from the suburbs of Greater Boston and placid, shirtwaisted mothers and aunts.

Mr. Pinckney emerged from the garden at the point where the Back Bay merges itself discreetly into the West End, crossed Charles Street and then Beacon as well.

He walked at a moderate pace along Charles Street, past Chestnut, past Mt. Vernon, and, reaching Pinckney, began to mount Beacon Hill along the steep incline of that street of cats, boarding-houses, decayed gentility and old ladies.

It was indeed an old lady whom he sought; a lady whose gentility seemed not so much decayed as atrophied; a lady who occupied her own ancestral mansion half-way up the hill, beyond Louisburg Square where Aristides and Christopher Columbus—"work of an unknown Italian sculptor, brought to Boston in 1849"—keep joint guard in their stony silence by Winter and Summer over an enclosed domain of neighborhood cats, implacable enemies of the harried sparrows here greatly congregated.

Miss Sophronia Attridge received her nephew sitting just within the sweep of the great bay-window, which ran all the way up the five stories of her red brick house, in her drawing-room on the second floor. An India shawl was about her thin shoulders; steel needles clicked unceasingly in her old-ivory hands, bluish and heavily-veined along their backs like the stripes on old-fashioned gloves. A replica of the *Calcutta*, barkentine, reposed under glass above her on the broad marble mantelshelf. Below, in the iron-grilled grate, an elaborate fan folded out of a copy of the *Transcript* concealed six years' accumulation of wood ashes.

She looked up on her nephew's arrival, her beady eyes glowing dully like brand-new shoe-buttons. Mr. Pinckney sat down and twirled a heavy gold ring about his finger. He stared at his aunt, neither speaking. The old woman's fingers never relaxed their activity; she knitted on steadily, looking at Mr. Pinckney with a faint glimmer of inquiry in her beady eyes.

At last he spoke with a dull sigh as if reluctant to break the silence of the quiet room.

"Ducette arrived yesterday evening," he said.

A delicate tremor shook the old woman.

** This is an Off-the-Trail story. See footnote at bottom of first contents page.*

She continued to knit in silence. Mr. Pinckney rose and walked around his aunt to the other end of the mantel where he stood looking intently through the covering glass at the minutely adjusted tangle of rigging on the *Calcutta*. In her his grandfather had added materially to his inheritance by the exercise of the Profession of Whaling, going in and out of the Port of New Bedford for forty years. He had made eleven voyages in that period, or, to be exact, ten and one-half. He had died at sea in the middle of the eleventh.

The old woman spoke.

"Will you lend me your hand?" she asked.

Mr. Pinckney approached his aunt. She placed her tremulous hand, which shook continually when she was not engaged in knitting, upon his arm and raised herself painfully to her feet. Partly leading him, partly guided by him, she walked slowly back through the long, high-studded, dignified room, stopping before a piece of furniture which stood erect against the rear wall, beside the jamb of the shut folding-doors dividing this room from its neighbor.

Leaning on his arm she took from her beaded reticule a worn keyring from which depended several old-fashioned keys. Selecting the shortest, of brass, she inserted it into the lock of the piece of furniture. This was narrow and high, of once yellow, now brown, maple-wood, six feet in height allowing for a foot of spindly legs, and two feet in width and depth with a slight bellying rotundity at the front. The lock was at the top, and when she had turned the key Mr. Pinckney pulled the top toward him. It came down like the writing-rest of a certain kind of old-fashioned desk, showing a number of pigeon-holes of various sizes each closed by a little door which fitted flush.

Removing the key, Miss Attridge selected another—the longest this time—a thin key with tiny wards. This she inserted into the largest of the compartment doors, but before she could turn it she was seized with a fit of violent trembling. She leaned heavily against her nephew and shook as if with an ague.

Mr. Pinckney reassured his drooping aunt. Presently she straightened herself with an effort which brought the blood into her parchment-like cheeks, and, with the stoop gone from her thin old shoulders turned the key in the lock and drew open the little door.

A Chinese snuff-box of red lacquer lay within, its end to the opening. She took it out and closed the compartment, locking it carefully. Then, holding the snuff-box tightly, she returned, supported by Mr. Pinckney, to her place in the bay-window. Mr. Pinckney took a chair near by and gazed curiously at the box. His aunt handed it to him, and turning it about he examined its exterior minutely.

Then, asking her permission, he opened it and looked within. On the top of the wad of cotton which filled the box, lay a tiny key. He picked this up gingerly and looked at it closely and at the stain as of a faint rust, which it had left on the indurated surface of the cotton batting. Inside the lid where the faded pink silk lining had impinged on the key's other surface was a corresponding slight stain. He replaced the key, snapped the box shut and handed it back to his aunt.

"It hasn't been opened in forty-six years," said she, in a voice not far removed from a whisper. "Father locked it in the pigeon-hole two days before he died." Her voice trailed out, reminiscently.

Mr. Pinckney interposed with a question:

"I've never quite understood that affair, Aunt Sophronia. Somehow it has never been clear to me. I have always understood that grandfather wanted to do something handsome for Eugene Ducette and that he left him the intarsia box and its contents, which I've heard about so many times, in his will; but the details are a kind of puzzle which I have never had solved for me."

Miss Attridge did not reply at once. It was habitual for her to weigh her words, even when she was addressing housemaids. She continued, therefore, placidly to knit, her steel needles clicking lightly.

BETWEEN the time when the schooner which had overhauled his vessel, the *Norman*, laden with coffee from Caracas, had sent a round shot across his bows, and the completion of the simple maneuver of coming about in obedience to that peremptory summons to stand and deliver on the high seas, Captain Harvey Dunham had made up his mind what policy to follow out. He had made the voyage from various West Indian and

South American ports many times across the Caribbean or through the islands, navigating the Virgin Passage or else between Porto Rico and San Domingo into the South Atlantic, and never before had his vessel been in an encounter with Free-traders.

But like every seafaring man of experience in those latitudes in the second decade of the nineteenth century, he knew their ways. More than one master of his acquaintance had been molested, and among these there were not lacking certain who had been simply allowed to proceed when once it had been made plain that there was nothing aboard to repay capture. Therefore he felt reasonably safe. Of however great value the Caracas coffee might be to his Boston owner, Jacob Attridge, when safely delivered into the hands of the Attridge agent in Savannah, it was plain enough to any one that Free-traders could do nothing with it. It was unusual, too, for an American vessel to be stopped, or a British. A Spaniard, now, or a Portuguese —even a Dane trading "down the Islands" from the Virgins—such would be fair picking for Fawcett or Jackson or Michael Breese, or the dreaded Brenner, Jacob Brenner, "The Scourge of the Caribbean," the most venomous and treacherous of them all! Something of this he was able to communicate to young Roger Attridge between his bellowed orders and in the interval during which the *Norman* hung in the wind, her jibs slapping angrily while the boats from the other vessel were slung outboard and dropped one after another in the water alongside, until every boat had been launched.

Dunham stopped mid-most his assurances to his owner's nineteen-year-old son, stopped with his lower lip pendulous as he saw what was toward. Five boats were in the water, each one almost dangerously loaded down with the Free-traders. The oars moved delicately as if the rowers feared mishap even in that quiet sea unruffled by the steady northeast trade. The entire crew of the *Norman*, catching their captain's apprehension and stilled by this infection, goggled at the boats from the swaying deck. Then, from the first mate, a shrewd bucko from Portland, Maine—

"Cripes, its Brenner himself!"

The five boats drew alongside, slowly. The nearest threw small grapples from its bow and stern and hung beside the *Norman* while the second made fast in similar workmanlike fashion.

Dunham cupped his hands, and, addressing over the heads of the nearest of the pirates the man who sat in the stern-sheets of the outermost boat, shouted:

"Cargo of coffee, captain, an' nothin' else besides the men's ditty boxes. Nothin' to repay ye for comin' aboard me, ef ye'll take my word for it, the same bein' Bible trewth so help me God!"

The young man, Roger Attridge, looked out over this unwonted configuration, his eyes wide. Save for the roar and whizz of the round shot, the whole transaction might have been something in the way of ordinary trade. But the young man's throat was dry with the trouble of it all nevertheless. Here before him appeared to be the entire crew of the Free-traders, among them, if the mate's say-so was to be relied upon, the most ruthless and bloodthirsty villain who had ever polluted the Spanish Main with his infamies, sitting there calmly in his boat, a fine laced hat on his head, which, with the elegance of the plum-colored coat he wore, contrasted sharply with his brutal face with its stubbly, ugly beard, and the sinister, glaring scar which, the result of a cutlass-wipe, he wore across the lower part of his face. The men in the boats looked precisely like all the other seafaring men he had seen.

The Free-trading captain appeared to reflect. He rubbed a dirty hand through the stubble of his beard and spat outboard.

"Got any rum?" he queried, running his eye along the freeboard of the clipper vessel and then up to her rigging, contemplatively. "I'm short."

"Pass ye over what I've got," responded Dunham, "if that'll do ye. 'Tain't much at that, for we ain't teched at Santa Cruz, neither port—straight from Caracas across."

He waited for the Free-trading captain to reply, the two larger vessels and the overcrowded boats from the pirate schooner tossing lightly in the gentle South Atlantic swell. No one spoke.

Again Brenner spat outboard, and wiped his chin in his black hand.

"I'll come aboard ye," he said, slowly, almost reflectively; then, with a sour grin—"if ye don't mind."

A roar of laughter shook the poised boats as their crews greeted their commander's show of wit. Even young Amos

Todd, the junior member of the *Norman's* crew sniggered, and young Roger Attridge turned to him a white and deprecating face.

The Free-trading captain muttered a grunted order, the boats closed in, and, grappling in turn along both sides, the last two passing around the *Norman's* stern for the purpose, the motley crews scrambled aboard in good order, the captain coming last. There was no resistance. Harvey Dunham had passed the word quietly as to that before the pirate's boats had been slung into the water.

The two captains, followed closely by a hulking brute from the pirate crew descended below into the after cabin. The boarding crew, outnumbering the *Norman's* men some seven or eight to one, scattered about the deck, curiously overlooking details of the rigging and deck gear. All were very quiet; ominously quiet, it seemed to young Roger Attridge, who glanced about him with a sinking of the heart.

Abruptly the big man who had followed the two captains below came out on deck. He placed a whistle to his lips and blew one blast. Instantly the Free-traders seized those of the *Norman's* crew who stood nearest to them, two or three, sometimes four or five men, making sure of each member of the crew. A dozen men who were in the vicinity of the forward hatchway began to knock out the wedges. The members of the *Norman's* crew were hastily passed forward and jammed into the forecastle, the hatch of which, as soon as they were all within, was shut and nailed down fast.

Few of the crew were even injured. Their handling had been rough and effective, but none had been armed, and the enormous odds against them had made anything like a disabling process unnecessary. They huddled together silently in the forecastle. There was nothing to say, nothing whatever to do. They stood, or sat on the edges of the bunks, and listened to what was afoot above decks.

The *Norman* was not got under weigh. She continued to hang in stays, and they could hear, sometimes like distant pistol-shots, the angry flapping of the jibs, and the short lurches which swung the boom and yards creakingly. But there was activity a-plenty above-decks nevertheless. The breaking open of the hold was plainly recognizable, and then there came a series of short thuds on the deck itself. It was not hard to guess what this meant. The pirates had broken into the hold and were broaching the cargo. The forecastle hatch was tight and sound and there was no crack through which the sharpest eye could steal a glimpse of what was going on above, but by the sounds it soon became obvious that the coffee bags were being passed up on deck by one gang and thrown overboard by another. This process went on, it seemed to the imprisoned crew, interminably, for the *Norman* was heavily laden or she could have shown her heels to the Free-trader.

"It's the *Norman* herself they want, the black ——s," remarked old Joe Connors; "not anything she has aboord her. It's just that they've swapped ship, 'tis all it is."

The process of lightening the *Norman* continued far into the night. It was three in the morning before it stopped, and then the clipper was got under weigh and held to a steady course which the mates decided was somewhere near west-south-west.

"It's Andros in the Bahamas," averred Sniffen the first mate," as sure as sailin', fer that's where this Brenner has his hidin'-hole, up among the creeks. An' it'll be 'jine or go over' for every man-jack of us, come its mornin',"

To young Attridge it appeared as if the world, his world, was at an end. He sat on the edge of a bunk, dry with a carking apprehension of utter ruin which gnawed at his heart. He had had, in common with his companions, no sleep whatever, and his stomach, like theirs, was empty. The exigencies of this, his first voyage, had thrown him into closer contact than he had ever previously known with the rough men who made up the crew of this ship of his father's, although his major association was, of course, with the *Norman's* officers with whom he was quartered. There was little choice, however, between the two groups since the officers of Yankee clipper ships in the twenties were only the more capable with fist and brain. Their manners were quite as uncouth as were those whom they ruled aboard ship *vi et armis*.

This was a mature group of men aboard the *Norman*, staunch men who shipped again and again in his father's liberal employ which provided ample crews and a sufficient supply of food, no mean inducements in that or any other day of sailing vessels. The nearest to anything like

companionship offered to this son of a Boston merchant prince was the presence aboard of Amos Todd, the ship's boy, who was one year his senior and who had been with the ship since he was sixteen. But beyond the similarity in their ages, the two young men found little in common.

Todd was a product of the wharves, a young man without origins, hard-bitten, silent, with enough brains it appeared to do his minimum of work in such fashion as just to escape the brutal correction which any dereliction therein would have brought down upon him. His furtiveness, his ingrained selfishness, repelled young Attridge strongly, and there had been but little intercourse between the two. Now in this direful strait, the freemasonry of youth drew them together.

They were sitting side by side on a bunk's sharp edge, when day dawned, the sudden, bright day of tropical latitudes, the day which was to mark the greatest, the deepest and most far-reaching change which would ever come to young Roger Attridge.

With the dawning of day a stir began among the imprisoned men. Joints were stretched, cramped limbs, aching through want of sleep, were rubbed, a thin grumble of talk emerged in which, curiously enough, the dominant note was not their common danger but their common hunger.

But this was promptly cut short by the approach of a gang along the deck above and the grinding of the nails being withdrawn from the hatch. This was soon thrown back, and the sunlight streamed down into the forecastle.

"Hi, thar, do we git coffee?" inquired a hard-featured Yankee sailorman from a bunk's edge.

A mustachioed face thrust itself into plain sight in the hatchway above.

"Ye'll take no harm if ye mind yer manners," said this spokesman. "Ye're with Brenner as ye may know by now, an' Brenner's way'll be known to ye. Ye're to come back on deck by twos, the rest to wait till summoned. An' the man that tries crowdin'll be pistoled, straight. No rush now, or it'll be the worse for ye! Ye're fourteen an' we're ninety-one includin' ship's orf'cers. Up with ye! Brenner scragged yer cap'n to rights, first off, ye'll do well to know. Up with ye, now! Show a leg up, bullies!"

The two mates, as became their position, stepped forward and mounted the perpendicular ladder to the deck. From his position, far forward, young Attridge, his face white and drawn, saw through the forecastle's dusty murk the feet and legs of the group which crowded about them as they disappeared up the ladder and stepped out into the glaring sunshine of the deck. He saw these feet and legs, immediately move aft, the two officers in the midst of a numerous group.

A deathly silence settled on the men in the forecastle. They knew enough of Free-traders' procedure to realize what was forward, something by anticipation of the terrible choice now being presented to their natural leaders.

"It's jine or go over!" whispered Amos Todd to young Attridge, and the latter covered his face with his hands. In a deathly silence the men in the forecastle awaited the verdict from above. In many a mind down there, doubtless, too, this would regulate their own choice. If the two mates stood staunch, the Free-traders would have little chance of adding to their numbers out of this ship's crew. Men looked at each other furtively, an unspoken question in their eyes. A sound disturbed the perfect silence in which they were listening for those two splashes alongside which would indicate that the mates had refused to join.

"Shet that noise," whispered an old seadog fiercely, peering into the farthest recess of the forecastle.

The noise subsided. It was young Roger Attridge sobbing, hysterically, his nerves strained too taut under that terrible stress of waiting.

After what seemed an interminable time, they heard the splashes alongside which indicated that the two mates had stood staunch and had refused to join.

Before they could express their joint horror, two more men were ordered on deck. The men hesitated, and were roundly cursed for hanging back. Finally two who were nearest the ladder were hustled to its foot by their companions, and mounted. Again the remainder left in the forecastle waited, in tense silence. Again two men of that ship's crew proved their manhood, as faintly the dismal splashes overside made themselves heard. This process was repeated again and again. Every man of the *Norman's* crew proved himself staunch.

That is, all but the two youngest members of that dreary company, now left alone, each hidden as best he might conceal himself in a bunk.

The Free-traders descended, knowing that only twelve of the known fourteen had come out, and roughly dragged them to the ladder. They ascended to the accompaniment of vicious knife-pricks intended to facilitate their speed on deck.

Not a single man of their late companions of the forecastle remained and they were given short choice.

The two, limp and cowering, were hustled aft to where Brenner himself, his head bare and in his shirt, was pacing across decks. They were in a state of collapse when they arrived before this butcher of the seas, their nerve completely gone. They had passed the plank, lashed outboard, with a long end projecting, on their way.

"Ye'll join me or go over; and make it a quick jump," barked Brenner. He needed no more men, and the monotony of the others' uniform choice had worn upon him somewhat. He was anxious to get this formality over and done with.

"I'll stand with ye, captain," replied Todd, promptly, his knees shaking, his voice a thin crow. Brenner looked at him, contempt and interest mingled in his look.

"And you, young fellow?" to Attridge.

Roger Attridge was incapable of speech. He nodded dully.

The two were immediately surrounded by the dozen men who had accompanied them aft from the forecastle; their hands were shaken and their backs roughly slapped. Then all hands were called aft to the piping of a bosun's whistle, and tin noggins of rum served out to all hands, Brenner toasting his newest recruits. Todd swallowed his rum with avidity and smacked his lips. Young Attridge, his mind in a jumble of incoherency, choked over his, but managed to worry it down.

The rum revived him somewhat, and soon went to his head, and it was in a daze that he received the pair of horse-pistols which were handed to him by Brenner's master-at-arms, and staggered to the galley at the prompting of Todd, who was wearing his with a certain air, for coffee, of which he drained three cups, burning his tongue.

Their course was laid for Andros in the Bahamas, where, concealed among the tortuous creeks which formed an impregnable defense, lay Brenner's village. The Free-trader's schooner, which had been damaged, had been scuttled, and everything transferred during the night to the *Norman*.

There Brenner laid her up for refitting, and the *Norman* was careened on the beach for scraping and a general overhauling, while one of Brenner's men outlined in white, before the sable repainting, the letters of *Lapwing* across her stern-post and on both sides of the cat-heads along the bows. Brenner had a pretty taste in ship's names.

It had required five days for the *Norman* to reach the mouth of the creek on Andros, up which she was kedged and poled for the best part of a mile to the pirate village; and five days, at nineteen, can do wonders. The native furtiveness of Todd had been exchanged gradually for a kind of superficial bluster; Attridge settled into a state of eerie content that he had at any cost preserved his life. The air felt very sweet to him and the skies were very blue and beautiful when he tumbled up on deck mornings.

He resolutely put away from him the recurrent desire to analyze his weakness in joining, and that prompting of conscience became less and less frequent, less and less peremptory. To be sure, he had not yet engaged in any piratical deeds. He was a Free-trader only by passive acquiescence in a set of conditions too strong for any resolution he might have formed in his proper setting at home in Boston.

AND when, six weeks later, the *Lapwing* ran down and captured with no effort at all a small Portuguese island-trader, ten miles out of San Juan the whole proceeding was too workmanlike and commonplace to cause him any particular qualm. There was no resistance, and Brenner took only the captain's money-box and his supply of rum and claret. The "long tom" which had been mounted in the *Lapwing's* stern settled that luckless vessel which sank before they had left her half a mile astern, and one could barely hear the yells and curses of the doomed crew at that distance. Brenner had thoughtfully stove her boats.

That small tilt on the high seas was only the precursor of many, however. Brenner swore that his recruits had brought him luck. Vessel after vessel was scrutinized, and either carefully avoided, or pursued,

run down, and captured; and when, weeks later, a real battle became necessary, Brenner having ventured to overhaul and board a British bark, Attridge had become so accustomed to his association that he joined in the mêlée almost light-heartedly. The psychology of fighting in company with those who were on "his side," completely obscured the moral issues involved.

Young Todd really found himself in this bloody scrimmage, for it was hardly more than that, the bark's crew being outnumbered at least three to one, and was in the thick of the fight, his weasel face contorted with the lust of killing. He was hauled off by two of his more seasoned companions, in a frenzy of killing, slashing with his cutlass into a heap of dead about the place where British skipper had fallen fighting bravely against impossible odds.

"Young cockerel," said Brenner, grinning evilly.

This life went on for seventeen months. Twice they had put in to the creek on Andros. They lost sixteen men in the fighting, and were recruited to the number of five from the crews which had been captured.

It was in the month of October, after what Brenner loudly asserted had been his most prosperous voyage, that they were homeward bound to Andros again.

The *Lapwing*, again foul, was to be careened and scraped, and generally refurbished, Brenner sparing no trouble or outlay to enhance the qualities of the staunch vessel which had served him so well.

They were coming up, close-hauled, a day's sail away from their goal when they sighted the *Antelope*, schooner, a Boston vessel in the Island trade, and at once tacked in pursuit.

Roger Attridge at once recognized the *Antelope*, a vessel with which he had been familiar for years as the property of his uncle Charles Pinckney. He apprized Brenner of this fact, and begged him to desist from her capture. Anderson, the *Antelope's* captain, was a man whom he had known intimately since childhood.

Brenner cursed him for a fool.

That afternoon he saw old Billy Anderson play the man.

"I'll see ye in —— first!" shouted Anderson when the choice was set before him, and then this old friend who had whittled boats for him when he was a small child cursed him long and fervently under the red and angry sun as he stepped out on the plank.

The next night, ashore at the village, at nine o'clock, he walked up to Brenner's house to have this matter out with him. He had experienced every throe of a complete revulsion; and this, after the hard life he had been leading, stiffened him to the point where he cared for nothing. He was utterly desperate, his mind made up, at the end of his rope.

Brenner lived austerely alone in the large house which stood farthest back from the creek-beach village. Attridge entered without ceremony, simply opening the door. Brenner was seated at a large table, a box before him. He met this intrusion, which was unheard of, with a quick glance of wonderment and a rattling volley of curses that would have done credit to the pirate Fawcett.

Attridge had no opportunity to present his case, for Brenner, his eyes bloodshot and suddenly protruding, almost inarticulate with fury, kept up a crescendo of curses which utterly blasted every attempt the young man made to speak his mind. Trying vainly to get in a word he walked toward Brenner, who, as he approached, leaned far across the table and dealt him a blow across the mouth with the back of a dirty hand. It was a contemptuous blow, the kind ordinarily delivered to a woman or a ship's boy.

"Ye cursed swab!" he ended, and struggled for breath, his face purple.

Seeing red, young Attridge launched himself at Brenner across the table-top. Automatically he seized the great knife which hung on his lanyard, and the knife, driven by a force in which was concentrated all the bitter remorse and hatred of which the young man's nature was capable, pierced down through the shoulder behind the collar-bone, clear to the hilt, ten inches of razor-edged blade, and the curses froze on Brenner's evil lips. He slithered and collapsed under the young man's weight, as the table rocked and righted itself, and Attridge found himself, with teeth bared, looking into the face of a corpse.

At once the possible consequences of his deed came crowding into his imagination. He disengaged himself from the table and the body, which hung collapsed in the chair, withdrew the knife with a great wrench,

and backing away, his eyes remaining on the evil, contorted face which would set in that expression of goggle-eyed surprize which had been upon it when the great knife sank home so unexpectedly; and, finding the door, locked it quickly on the inside. He expected a rush from outside, but no rush came. He listened, and heard no sound save the distant tinkling of a mandolin which had been playing when he walked up to Brenner's house. He heard the sough of the trade wind through the rustling branches of the coconut-palms outside, but no footstep approached the house.

He left the door, and sat down limply on a stool and looked at Brenner's face. The expression of the face was unchanged. With widely popping eyes, it seemed to look into his eyes with a questioning, baleful glare.

Then his leg began to pain him, and he shifted his position, glancing at the clock which Brenner would never wind again. It was half-past nine! The entrance and the killing had not occupied more than thirty seconds; he had been sitting there, cramped and motionless, for half an hour!

Then his faculties of reason began to reassert themselves. He saw at once that he was safe for the time being, and at that moment of realization a daring plan began to form itself in his mind. If only he dared! No one had come; no one was likely to come. Except for some very special occasion no one would think of disturbing Brenner, at this time of night, and on shore after a long cruise. The other occupants of the village had their own occasions to attend to, and he knew well that there was nothing unusual toward.

He slipped to the door, gingerly unlocking it and, opening it on a crack, peered without. There were no other houses within a stone's throw, and everything was quiet. He heard Dutch Joe singing a catch at some distance; the mandolin began to tinkle again. A screech of woman's laughter came faintly up to his ears from some house down near the beach.

He turned back into the room, and again locking the door, approached the ghastly figure, the clothes now saturated with the blood which had poured from the deep heart-wound. He stood across the table and straightened himself, looking the corpse of Jacob Brenner in the face. He looked long and earnestly and then, reaching out before him, under the sightless eyes of its late owner, he picked up the box and, with this under his arm, retraced his steps to the door, unlocked it, and passing through into the night without, locked it after him, and tossed the key far into the bushes at the side.

Then, the box under his jacket, he walked with a confident tread to his hut which he occupied along with Todd down near the beach.

Todd was preparing for bed when he arrived, and was reasonably sober. He told him what he had done, in a whisper, and told him of the plan which had been forming in his mind. As he spoke of this plan it clarified itself in his mind, its expression bringing out its feasibility. When he had finished, Todd, without speaking, looked at him long and earnestly. He appeared to be thinking as deeply as his slightly befuddled brains would allow. Finally he smiled, a wry smile which showed his ugly, blackened teeth, and held out his hand.

"I'm on it with ye," he said, and picked up his hat.

The two, without further preparation left their cabin, fastening the door after them, and walked down the few steps which separated them from the beach of the creek which at this point was broad and shallow except for the channel where, farther up, the *Lapwing* lay riding at her anchors fore and aft. The light evening trade wind began to die down.

They walked along the creek-side in the opposite direction some distance, until they came to a row of small boats pulled out on the sandy mud. They would have to row. Not a breath now stirred.

Into the largest, which lay farthest along in the direction they had been following, Attridge climbed and, slitting his jacket down the back, proceeded to wrap one of the two portions about the blade of an oar, fastening it tightly with a bit of twisted twine. Todd proceeded farther and disappeared. By the time the second oar-blade was snugly wrapped in the cloth of the jacket, he had returned, and carefully placed in the bow of the small boat a gallon rum jug filled with fresh water, and a small sack of biscuits which he had obtained from the storehouse.

Then, Attridge at the oars, and Todd pushing, they launched the boat, and silently propelled it down the creek.

It was not until they had passed eight or nine turns that they hauled in the oars, and removed their improvised mufflers from the blades. Then, rowing and resting alternately, they passed down the tortuous creek for the remainder of its course to the sea, and, emerging, turned its nose toward New Providence, forty miles away.

All night they rowed, and when the first streak of the sudden dawn found them, they were nearer New Providence than Andros, which lay in a blue haze behind them. They stepped their mast and caught the morning trade.

It was mid-afternoon when two young men, who appeared desperately weary, and upon whose bronzed faces appeared what was manifestly a fresh layer of surface sunburn, dragged themselves into the office of the American consul-general at Nassau. The consul-general had not finished his afternoon nap, and they took advantage of the opportunity to rest on the bench on his gallery.

At four-thirty, the consul-general received them.

They told him they were the last survivors of the schooner *Antelope* out of Boston. The *Antelope* had been attacked and captured by Brenner two days previously. There had been a bloody fight, for resistance had been offered. They two owed their escape to the fact that the spokesman, Miller, had been at the wheel, while his companion, Jewett, had been, as ship's carpenter, engaged below when the *Antelope* had been surprized by a neighboring vessel displaying the Jolly Roger almost under their bows, and had thus emerged on deck, as the battle was concluding. They had managed a word together, and had pretended to join the Free-traders in the certainty that they would be only a day at sea, as Brenner, for it was his crew that had captured them, was, as they learned from chance remarks overheard, *en route* to his village. The engagement had taken place within sight of Andros and it was common knowledge among seafaring men that his place was on one of that island's creeks.

This narrative was followed by an exactly truthful account of their ready escape, from the time they had been, as they alleged, left alone together in a cabin near the shore of the creek.

The consul made no difficulty in believing so direct and convincing a story, and he sent them home to Boston after receiving from them a carefully explained and wholly misleading set of directions as to how to reach the pirate village, together with what account they were able to offer of its appearance and disposition. By this they hoped to prevent contradiction of their story. This account they repeated to the governor-general at Government House, and their statement was duly recorded in the archives of the Government of Nassau.

On their way home, Attridge considered carefully their chances when they should arrive. He concluded that these were at least fair. He concocted a tale for Boston consumption which he tested at all points, and which depended for credence upon its perfect simplicity. This he drilled carefully into Todd's head.

They were landed in New York, and a packet took them to Boston a week later. In New York they resumed their proper names, and paid for their fares out of the slender purse which had been subscribed for them in Nassau.

Arrived in Boston, they gave out that they had been wrecked in a hurricane, which had blown the old *Norman* out of her course when not three days out from Caracas, among the maze of small islands in the Caribbean, and the account of their life there, their ultimate rescue from a coconut palm raft by a Haytian slaver, and their sojourn among the blacks of San Domingo, was regarded as so romantic that many agreed it should be published as memoirs.

There was, of course, no one in Boston to contradict them. Brenner had seen well to that. Dead men tell no tales! No one questioned this specious and convincing yarn, and as the *Norman* had for long been on the missing list, everybody concerned was glad to learn that two, at least, of her crew had survived.

YOUNG Roger Attridge, sitting at an office desk in his father's counting-house one morning, was summoned below by Negro Sam who acted as porter in that establishment. It was a month after the wanderers' return, and a month had wrought a remarkable transformation in the bronzed and bearded young sailorman who had dragged his weary steps into the cool gallery outside the American consul's office in far Nassau. He

was dressed now in a fine suit of brown cloth, and although his deep tan had persisted, he bore little resemblance to what he had been so short a time before.

His visitor was Amos Todd, very much down-at-heel, very thin, and looking, if anything, more disreputable than on the day he had arrived in the Port of Boston.

"I want a word with you, Roger," said Todd simply.

Quite unconscious of his expression, which Todd watched narrowly, young Roger Attridge looked at the scarecrow figure from its dilapidated felt hat to its worn and bursting boots which lacked even patches.

Todd smiled his ugly, sneering smile, showing his disfigured teeth.

"Oh, I know it won't do in there—" pointing to the counting-house—"among all your fine friends and relations," said he, in a kind of whine which scarcely suppressed the sneer which was concealed behind his humble tone. "Just step into some public place, can't you, and you might get me something to eat while we are talking."

Roger stepped inside for his hat, and emerging led the way to Peters' Coffee House in State Street near by. The two entered, and Todd, at the young gentleman's invitation, ordered a copious meal. Roger Attridge sat across the table from him in silence, watching him while he ate his food and washed it down with a huge tankard of ale. He said nothing, but he could not wholly hide the disgust he felt with this tattered guttersnipe who had so lately and for so long a time been his boon companion. He shuddered once, and Todd's keen eyes caught the shudder, and he smiled to himself.

When he had finished an enormous meal, he leaned back, and without any preamble said:

"What I want to say is that you've got to provide for me now. You have everything, I have nothing. I won't take up any more of your time, Roger, for I suppose you have to get back to your office. I'm only telling you—not asking you, mind—that you've got to provide for me and provide well, or I'll peach."

Then, as Attridge started forward in his chair, his face changing color:

"Oh, you needn't worry. There's no one near enough to hear, and I'm talking little above a whisper. Look ye, now! Here's my plan, all laid out fair for you like cards on the table before ye, man. Take the two stories, the one you told to the man in Nassau and the other that you gave out here. I've got 'em both clear as a bell, rot me, for didn't you drive them both into my head? You told the Nassau man we were from the *Antelope*, and he took that down, and you've told the Boston people that we're from the *Norman*, and that's the truth. But the two don't hitch if once they're brought together, and there's naught in the accounts to tell of Brenner and the months we spent aboard the *Lapwing*. Ah! that gets you in the guts, eh? Well, you'll buy my silence, that's all. I want twenty dollars now. Oh, you needn't think I'll milk ye dry, not me! But you'll do as I say, rot me, or by —— I'll peach. I'm just Amos Todd, and Amos Todd's naught. But you're somebody and you'll be more as you get older. Why, I'll not be surprized to see you owning the counting-house before many years. I've said my say, and now I'll take the money, and when I want more I'll come and ask ye for it."

Shivering, pallid, unmanned, young Roger Attridge took his wallet from his pocket with a gesture as furtive as any Todd himself could employ. He counted out the notes without a word, and still without a word, rose, and walked like a drunken man out of the coffee house.

Todd sat looking after him, leering. He watched him all the way to the door and through it, and then, turning about in his chair, he rapped sharply on the table with his knuckles. The waiter approached, an expression of disgust on his face. Such as this ratty sailorman were not common guests at Peters' Coffee House. Todd looked him up and down, and the waiter quailed under his truculent eye. Todd flourished his notes. The waiter goggled.

"Bring me a fresh mug of ale, sirrah," commanded Todd, "and let it be your best, ——!"

ONLY the steel needles broke the silence of the quiet room in the mansion on Pinckney Street. Indeed their gentle clicking, being almost a continuous sound, was of itself soothing and served rather to accentuate the silence than to disturb it.

At last Miss Attridge broke the silence.

"The intarsia box has been held for the

Ducettes ever since my father died. Eugene Ducette was a man I could never approve. But he was a thorough whaler, and an excellent ship's officer. I must give the devil his due! His people had been Nantucket whalers and shipbuilders for generations, before they went, as many Nantucketers did go, to New Bedford. They were of French *emigré* extraction I imagine in the first place. But somehow—they never became 'Folks!' "

She looked at her nephew as if enlisting his comprehension. He nodded to her understandingly.

"Eugene Ducette was a very handsome man. He was thirty when father died; I, twenty-six. He had been for two voyages with father on the *Calcutta*. It was during the third of these that father died at sea. Father was devoted to him. I could easily understand that although I could not approve it. Father, you see, had become an old man without realizing it. But Eugene saw that clearly, and he took advantage of it. He built up a kind of ascendency over my father. He attended to many of father's affairs and, I am bound to say, he did this very well indeed, for he was a very able man. But, he was underhand about it! He always managed somehow to make father think he was managing his own affairs, whereas it was really Eugene who suggested the various things to him.

"He first went with father as second mate. On the next voyage he was promoted one grade to succeed Emmanuel Smith who had gone with the Nyes as captain of their ship the *Islander*, a South Pacific vessel also in the whaling trade. Father promoted Amos Todd to be captain at the same time. He had always acted as captain himself down to that time.

"But that arrangement did not satisfy Eugene Ducette. When they came to sail on the last voyage father took, the captain, Todd, was missing. They found him later in a tavern, drunk, as was supposed. Father sailed without him, which was unheard of among whaling-men. It is not difficult to understand whose idea that was! Todd came to see me here four days later. He swore to me that Eugene had hocussed him in the tavern over a glass of ale. He was known to be a very abstemious man at all times.

"But Eugene was at sea, and as captain of the *Calcutta*. Little he cared about poor old Todd, who was regarded as one of his best friends.

"Whenever a letter came from father it was full of Eugene. It made me writhe!"

Miss Attridge sat up stiffly in her chair, the needles speeding, and looked fairly at her nephew. Her parchment cheeks were faintly flushed.

"You will wonder why that was so," she continued. "You are probably saying to yourself: 'Why did she dislike Eugene Ducette so intensely?' You will think, 'he was an ambitious young man, a little unscrupulous. Why should she think as she does about him, even at this late day?'

"Well, it is a little hard to speak of—even now. But I will tell you the reason I think as I do. It was because his ambition was not bounded by his evil exploit in getting poor old Todd's place away from him. He aspired higher than that!"

The old woman paused in her recital. The flush upon her aged countenance mounted and grew. The needles were fairly flying now.

"He aspired to be his owner's son-in-law! He had long before begun upon his attempts to court me. Whenever he was in Boston between the long voyages, he was forever at our house. And I must admit, Charles, that at first he succeeded in making an impression. But, thank God, I saw through him before very long! It was not only the rough whaler that belied his fine clothes and his attempt at being a gentleman. Of course my father, in a sense, was a whaler too. It was rather the understanding that I came to have of his character, as I have tried to describe it to you, that repelled me.

"He proposed marriage to me before he left Boston that last time. I refused him. I offered him no hope for the future. I tried to make it clear to him that I would not marry him then or, indeed, at any other time. But I think he must have misjudged my motives altogether. I have always believed that he thought if he had been the owner of a vessel instead of a whaler's mate, I would have acted otherwise.

"I have always been quite sure that that was why he hocussed Amos Todd. But if anything else had been needed to spoil any possible chance he might have had with me, that vile deed would have supplied it. Of course, as soon as I knew that

Todd's story was true—I sent to New Bedford and had inquiries made—I wrote to father and told him the facts. There was no telling when he might get my letter, but he did get it eventually, and I imagine that while he would not doubt my word, he must have believed me mistaken. He had his own opinions about women in affairs! I should have thought my account of Eugene Ducette's daring to propose marriage to me would have convinced him what sort of person he was harboring and favoring. But I dare say it only strengthened his view that I was prejudiced against his friend!

"There must have been some doubts in his mind. Of that I am perfectly certain. You see, I might be right after all; he would find that out when he returned, and see justice done. That was like him. But he never returned.

"About the middle of that voyage Eugene saved his life. I have always believed that he would have allowed him to drown if he had thought he could have succeeded him as owner!

"Naturally, that established him more firmly than ever in father's esteem. It was just about that time that he rewrote his will. The old will was here in Boston, in Mr. Endicott's office on State Street, but he did not wish, I believe, to trust to a detached codicil, and so he reproduced the will from memory and added a clause in which he bequeathed to his 'esteemed friend, Eugene Ducette, captain of his ship the *Calcutta*, the intarsia box' which he described minutely, 'together with its contents,' and he delivered the box to Cassius Riley, the second mate, whom he named as one of the executors. In the codicil was the condition that Eugene should apply to me in person for the key of the box, which he placed in that little Chinese snuff-box which he always carried about with him, and which you have just held in your hand.

"The news of what he had done made a great stir aboard the *Calcutta*, as you may well imagine. Of course Eugene Ducette knew all about it. The very ship's cat must have known about it! I don't suppose they talked about anything else for the next month.

"Then, two days after making the will, father was found dead in his cabin one morning. There was no surgeon, of course. There could be no inquest, no proper means of inquiry. Father's body was buried at sea, and Ducette, as captain, wrote me an account of it, a very formal letter as was suitable. I received this letter seven weeks later by way of Vancouver and San Francisco. That, Charles, is the whole story."

"But what of Ducette, all these years?" interposed Mr. Pinckney.

"Ducette never came to claim the key! And no one knows what is in the intarsia box to this day. The box, of course, was his property, but he could not get it until he should come and claim the key. Cassius Riley, the mate, delivered the box into Mr. Endicott's hands for safe-keeping, and there it has remained, in his office, ever since.

"Eugene died two weeks ago, as you know, and now this young man, his grandson, is his heir. The box, of course, goes to him with the rest of Eugene's property. I have consented, as you know, Charles, to the transfer of the key to young Mr. Ducette. It was kind of you, Charles, to come and tell me he had arrived in Boston. Perhaps you'd like to stay and take luncheon with me, and so be here when he arrives at two o'clock."

Mr. Pinckney had shown much interest in his aunt's recital. It worked into an intelligible whole a story which to him had always been a mild mystery. He agreed at once to remain; and to luncheon, which his aunt always took here in her drawing-room, they shortly proceeded.

Miss Attridge ate her lunch with a certain zeal. She was constrained to the consumption of a very light dinner, and luncheon was her substantial meal of the day.

"I shall be interested to see the young man," she vouchsafed, as she struggled remorselessly with her shad.

Luncheon was just finished and removed when Mr. Rupert Bryden, a confidential clerk of the Endicotts, arrived from their office with the box which had been a middle-aged man's lifetime in his firm's custody. He was shown into the drawing-room and he placed the box prominently upon the huge library table which ran across the embrasure of the bay-window, and near which Miss Attridge was accustomed to sit with her knitting. Mr. Pinckney conducted his aunt to her chair and stood beside the lawyer's clerk while he removed the ancient wrapping from about the box. The intarsia box was not devoid of a certain interest for

its own sake. It was heavy, long and narrow, of a dark, shining wood. It was inlaid with crude curlycues of scroll-work such as would at once have identified it for a specialist as West Indian work dating from about a century previous. The key-hole was small, matching the size of the little key of the snuff-box, and about its edge were a few yellowed chips which showed that it had once been surrounded with rough ivory.

The unwrapping had hardly been completed when Mr. Louis Ducette was announced, and the bearer of this name followed the gray-haired maid into the drawing-room. The young man came through the long room toward the group of three at its end without self-consciousness. He was clearly handsome, and he was very well and plainly dressed. Mr. Pinckney received him and presented him to his aunt. He bowed to her, and then shook hands with Mr. Rupert Bryden. Then, turning again to his hostess, he said—

"This is very interesting, don't you think so?"

Miss Attridge looked at him closely. He was singularly like his grandfather as she remembered him in the days when he had been second mate of the *Calcutta*. There was the same appearance of slenderness, belied by the depth of chest which closer scrutiny revealed; the same firm, square-cut jaw; the high-arched eyebrows. But there was an additional quality about this young man, a fineness, an indication of sureness of himself, which, though at once unostentatious and obvious, defied analysis to fix upon any of its characteristics as obtrusive. With her usual deliberation Miss Attridge delayed her answer. And when she had made up her mind what to say to him, she was surprized to find that she was looking at him precisely as she might have looked at her own great-nephew, if she had been endowed with such a relative. Instinctively she abandoned the phrase upon which she had settled, for a whimsicality.

"I have been wondering for forty-six years what was in that box!"

She smiled, thinly, up into the young man's face. Noting the ready response which lighted up his olive skin and hazel eyes, she continued:

"Now you are doing me the best of good turns. You are making it possible—I trust—for me to know at last!"

Louis Ducette smiled back into her faded, buttony, old eyes; a friendly, a disarming, smile. That flung wide for her the gates of her memories. It was Eugene's smile to the life. It showed her, mysteriously, as if through a window, somewhat of his soul, and it was something which, considering her prejudices, she had not at all expected to see there. It showed her firmness of purpose, an honest heart, a clear mind. There was in it, frankness, a kind of nobility. She was startled, and she drew into herself. She sighed deeply, glanced down at her knitting, and did not speak again.

"We will open the box together," said young Ducette, in the tone and with the *flair* of a child proposing an adventure to another.

Miss Attridge knitted demurely on. Her needles had not missed a stitch since luncheon.

Mr. Rupert Bryden, clearing his throat, delivered himself of a speech.

"According to the terms of this trust," said he, "whereby the firm of Endicott and Endicott has held this legacy in their possession in behalf of the late Eugene Ducette or his heirs or assigns, I am authorized to deliver this box, known as 'the intarsia box,' into the possession of Mr. Louis Ducette, the heir-at-law as well as the beneficiary under the last will of the late Eugene Ducette, provided the condition which is to release it from our custody is complied with. I request, therefore, Mr. Louis Ducette to make verbally the demand designated in the will of the late Roger Attridge, which requires Miss Sophronia Attridge to deliver to him the key of this box, and which, as she has already indicated, she is now prepared to deliver over to him."

Mr. Bryden paused, and drew a deep breath. Then he smiled, and, abandoning his somewhat stilted verbiage, summed up—

"Will you please ask Miss Attridge for the key?" he recapitulated.

Young Ducette had listened courteously to the rigmarole. Now he nodded and turned to his hostess, who had unfastened her reticule and was holding the Chinese snuff-box in a hand which trembled a little; the needles, for the moment, inactive.

"Will you oblige me with the key for the intarsia box, Miss Attridge?" he asked.

She held out the snuff-box. The young

man took it from her with an inclination which was almost a bow.

Mr. Rupert Bryden, an expression of infinite reluctance on his face, was making his preparations for departure. He had fulfilled his function. Young Ducette caught his expression, and grinned.

"Perhaps, if Miss Attridge is willing," said he, "Mr. Bryden would like to remain and see what is in the box."

Mr. Bryden heaved an audible sigh of relief and looked gratefully at the young man. The box had become a mystery as well as a tradition at Endicott and Endicott's.

Young Ducette took out the little key and inserted it into the lock between the chips of old, yellowed ivory. He pressed it, first to the left, and then, meeting resistance that way, again, to the right. Under considerable gentle pressure from his strong fingers the lock snapped with a sharp click, and he carefully pried up the lid. The two other men had moved close to the table. Miss Attridge was leaning forward in her chair. Her needles were fairly flying.

The opened lid revealed a rectangular wrapped package within, which fitted the box tightly. Its paper covering, stiff and brittle with years, was tied about with heavy, tarred twine, from which, as the lid rose, there arose the faint, pungent odor of oakum.

Young Ducette removed the package carefully, the brittle covering chipping off in flakes. Mr. Bryden produced a penknife—implement of his caste—and Ducette cut the twine and unwrapped the crackling old paper.

Within was a similarly shaped package, wrapped in oiled silk and fastened likewise, with tarred twine, which, in contact with the oiled silk, was still soft and pliable. This too was rapidly cut through and the inner covering unwrapped. Ducette's excitement was at a high pitch now and he worked hurriedly, though with a certain deftness. Both the other men leaned close; a second time Miss Attridge forgot to knit.

As Ducette turned the package over after pulling the ends loose what appeared to be a large hand dropped out and thudded down upon the table where it lay stiff and extended. The young man's breath came sharply. Mr. Pinckney uttered a guttural exclamation and his ruddy jowls went a dead white. The lawyer's clerk clutched the edge of the table in a spasmodic grip.

It was the old woman who recalled them to the commonplace.

"It's a glove!" said she, crisply.

Mr. Bryden giggled hysterically. Mr. Pinckney coughed, a raucous bellow designed to intimate that he, for one, had kept his composure. Ducette opened out the package carefully and out of it dropped three more wash-leather gloves on to the table top, with three separate dull thuds.

He laid down the crumpled wrapping and picked up the nearest glove. Its wrist-button had been thrust through the button-hole and the aperture wrapped about with seven or eight turns of the tarred twine which was tied with a firm square-knot. The twine was hastily snipped through, and then, out on the table, flashing and gleaming in a myriad coruscations, there rolled a great handful of jewels. They rattled out upon the table top, some rolling here and there, others, caught upon facetted surfaces, remaining in the central heap. A blazing emerald tumbled off the table's edge and pattered and bounced along the polished floor toward Miss Attridge, coming to a stop against the edge of her congress-gaiter.

Ducette seized the next glove, and the next, and the last, cutting through the twine and pouring out the gleaming contents over the first heap. Then, leaving this glittering fortune, he stepped back from the table courteously avoiding collision with the dumfounded Mr. Bryden, and bent to pick up the emerald which lay at Miss Attridge's foot.

She drew in her breath, as she watched him. Here it was at last—the Ducette vulgarity—coming out under this stress! They were not "Folks." They never had been; never could be. Here it was! Stopping to pick up one inconsiderable stone out of that pile! The smallness of it!

Ducette straightened up, the glorious jewel in his hand. He glanced at it appraisingly, and the old woman hugged herself as this corroboration of her bitter prejudices was enacted before her very eyes.

Then he handed the emerald to her with that same little inclination of the head which was almost a bow. He was smiling—Eugene's smile.

"This one seems to belong to you," he said, whimsically, and returned to the table.

She took it, without comment, and looked

at it thoughtfully as it glittered upon the palm of her hand, nothing of the turmoil within her penetrating to the surface which remained placid. Then a tear ran, unnoticed, down the unaccustomed path of her withered cheek.

"Oh, my dear boy!" she murmured, her voice tremulous, the tears standing in her beady eyes.

He turned, and quickly divining her emotion, smiled at her reassuringly, and then turned back again to the table at the sound of Mr. Bryden's voice.

"There seems to be something here that you haven't got out of the wrapping yet," said the lawyer's clerk. "I can see the edge of it, sticking out."

Ducette again picked up the wrappings from where he had dropped them in the excitement of the first sight of their contents, and turned them inside out. There, along the inner side of the portion which had been over the top of the box, was a letter, slightly adherent. It was large and square, and yellowed by time. It was addressed to "Miss Sophronia Attridge" in a fine, old-fashioned hand, in India ink, which had not perceptibly faded.

He handed it to her with one of his little bows. She took it in her disengaged hand, the other still holding the emerald, and looked at it with the expressionless, beady stare of the aged.

"Will you ring, Charles?" she asked. "Mr. Ducette will want to have his property wrapped again, and, of course, to take it with him."

Mr. Pinckney stepped across the room to the bell. Mr. Bryden, clearly fascinated, was still bending over the great heap of jewels. Ducette saw that Miss Attridge was deeply moved, and that she wished urgently to be alone. She must see, and soon, what message had come to her out of the dim past from her father writing just before his death nearly half a century ago, up there among the ice-floes of the Aleutian Archipelago. He understood that her last words carried no mere Bostonian dismissal!

Very quietly, lest he disturb her eerie mood, he turned back to the table. Mr. Bryden had just straightened up after a prolonged scrutiny at close range.

"Most of them are of great value," said he, judicially, "of great value. I have counted thirty-seven emeralds, apparently a set, for they are of the same size; probably from some very valuable collection. There are four cabochon rubies, thirteen——"

Mr. Pinckney, returning for a final look, expressed his interest by a slight grunting noise. He was a dull man at all times.

The gloves, refilled, were returned to the piled silk, and this, in turn, stuffed back into the box, which was then wrapped in fresh paper brought in by the maid. Young Ducette took this princely heritage under his arm and approached his hostess.

"You have been very kind," he said, holding out his hand deferentially.

She took it listlessly, looking long in his face, but saying nothing.

Mr. Bryden had elected to take his departure with Ducette, and Mr. Pinckney saw them safely down-stairs. When he returned to the drawing-room he addressed his aunt, but her mind was far away. Receiving no reply he tried again. Then it became obvious to his not very acute perceptions that she wanted urgently to be alone, and he aroused her only to take his leave.

She sat alone, the letter and the emerald still clasped in her hands. Crowding memories pressed upon her. Through her thoughts, evanescent though they were, there ran the persistent thread of a new idea, a very strange and curious idea; the idea that there might have been some intangible element, some unthought-of set of facts, which had always lain without her purview; something missing in what should have been her estimate of Eugene. This idea stirred and troubled her strangely, like a premonition.

Eugene was dead now; no longer of this world's company. She had never seen him again since that morning when he left Boston after his proposal; the morning before the day when, as captain of the *Calcutta*, he had sailed out of the Port of New Bedford on her father's last voyage. They had left this very house together that morning, her father and Eugene. Her father had turned to wave to her from the street below as he stepped into his carriage. She had never seen him again, because he had died at sea. And Eugene, too, had died, died to her, when she had refused him. He had been, as it were, buried, when she had learned what he had done to old Todd.

The letter crackled faintly under the pressure of her clenching hands. She came back abruptly into the present. She straightened her shoulders and spoke aloud.

The maid entered and supported her while her chair was being moved from its position close to the table, back into its usual place. The maid seated her afresh, adjusted the India shawl about her shoulders, and picked up the abandoned knitting from the floor. She placed the knitting beside her mistress, straightened a few disarranged articles on the great library table, and took her departure silently.

When the maid had gone, Miss Attridge slit the brittle paper of the envelope with her old ivory paper-cutter, and carefully withdrew the letter. It was faintly odorous of the sperm oil with which the silk wrapper had been treated. There were a great many of the thin, brittle sheets, all covered with her father's clear handwriting. It was dated July 24, 1859. It read:

My Beloved Daughter:

It is necessary that I should at this time make clear to you certain things which it is desirable for you to know. I wish I might leave them as they are, but that is impossible while Amos Todd remains alive, and I have no reason to believe that he will not be, and for a long time to come. It grieves me to know that you will have to think the less of your father, but it is altogether best that you should have the facts from him and so acquire them directly and truthfully. I will proceed to tell you what I have to say about myself.

You have heard how our clipper ship the *Norman* was wrecked in the Caribbean Sea when I was little more than a boy. You have heard that I was aboard the *Norman* and how I did not return to Boston for nearly two years afterward. But you do not know what I was doing during that time. No one knows, except Amos Todd, and Eugene, and God——

—I could only give in to Todd's demands; I had no other choice. Do you remember the story of Sindbad and his Old Man of the Sea, the old man who rode about on his back and would not be shaken off?

—Amos Todd has been my Old Man of the Sea.

—Eugene has been as true as steel. He has been the buffer between Todd and me. You must not imagine that Todd came down upon me for great sums. That was not his way. His taste is easily gratified—his taste for making my life a constant, unceasing misery. It is for that only that he lives. He prefers to keep me under his thumb, always. He has the whip-hand and he knows that I am helpless. That is why Eugene managed to leave him ashore. You can not imagine the relief! Eugene planned it himself; I should never have had the courage for such a stroke. Eugene has made it clear to me that Todd—whose soul, if he has one, is a rat's—will say nothing. That would kill the goose that lays his golden eggs. But I dread my return. Then he will begin again.

I have just made a new will so that there will be no risk in having the new clause carried out. I am leaving Brenner's jewels to Eugene—to my best friend in this world.

Two days ago he saved my life. I will confess to you, my beloved daughter, that I did not want to have it saved! Only for the appearance of the thing I would have resisted Eugene. No one but he knows that my falling overboard was no accident.

My conscience troubles me, always. I do not want to live. But especially I do not want to face Amos Todd again. He has been my Nemesis. But I want you, my dear child, to have everything that is, everything that is good—everything, too, that I possess.

The best of all my possessions is my friendship with Eugene. That, too, I would have you inherit. A word to the wise! You will take my meaning, and the rest is for you to decide.

I have never dared to do anything with the jewels. They are of great value—they were famed in the days I have been writing of, with my heart's blood for ink—throughout the length and breadth of the Caribbean. I have packed them in the box I took with me that night when I came out of Brenner's cabin on Andros. They are to be Eugene's, and—if you take my meaning—yours. They are his fortune; as I like to think, his patrimony. He has been more than a son to me; a good son.

So you will see why I am making the condition that Eugene must come to you for the key of the box before it is delivered to him, before he can claim his fortune. You will find it, as you will know before long when the new will is read to you, in the red Chinese snuff-box. Eugene has kept my secret. He has preserved the honor of our family.

I do not want to meet Todd again. I do not think I could bear it.

—I do not believe I shall live very long now, now that I have unburdened my soul to you who have the right to know—who must know—lest Todd should choose in his rat's heart to bring his revenge to bear upon *you* when I am safely out of his way.

I have set my affairs in order——

Be kind to Eugene. He is everything I have tried to convey to you, all that and more. And, my dear daughter, he loves you, as does your old father,

Roger Attridge.

With fluttering, tremulous hands Miss Attridge folded the many sheets of her letter together, and placed it beside its envelope upon the table beside her.

Then she sat very quietly, her hands still trembling, in spite of being clasped together in her lap.

Her father! A clear vision of him—his fine stature, his brown beard, his broadcloth clothes—came before her. She envisaged him as she had done countless times before as the perfection of a New England gentleman; fine-minded, bluff of speech; but of a courtesy the more pronouncedly apparent, at least to his equals who understood such matters, because so delicate and unobtrusive.

Her father! A pirate—a member of the vicious Jacob Brenner's bloodthirsty crew of cutthroats—a murderer. Worse, infinitely worse—a person admitting his own

timidity, dreading to meet Todd, old Amos Todd, a rheumatic whaling-captain!

Her father! A person devoid of the stability of the common sailors employed aboard the family vessels; there at the very threshold of his manhood. And at its end—one who had recourse to self-destruction—suicide—the last and lowest resort of the hopeless coward!

She thought suddenly of her nephew Charles. How like her father he was! Charles had never done anything notable, good or bad. He had always been negative, colorless. Charles, the only child of her long-dead sister, who, for lack of any one else worthy alliance had married her cousin, Charles Revere Pinckney 2d.

She looked inward. What had *she* ever done to deserve the deference which she had always enjoyed? What had she produced? What results had she had from life? Well, placidity; the infinite opportunities for self-expression; leisure. And what had she done with this abounding leisure, what had she ever expressed? She could think of nothing, nothing save the absurd pretensions, the absurd atmosphere, of her pride.

Three generations of them: her father, herself, Charles! The phrase, "one of the first families of New England," came into her mind, evoked from she knew not where.

Three generations—four—of "Folks!" Other generations back of these; "Folks," all "Folks!"

Her father! Piracy and stolen jewels—the booty of a knife-thrust! Herself, a shell of pride! Charles!

Her mind shifted, again suddenly, to the remembered vision of young Louis Ducette, Eugene's grandson. How like he was! She placed her withered hands over her heart and pressed them to her bosom.

Why had Eugene not come? Surely there had been in him no lack of self-confidence, of assurance. Why, he had actually dared to propose——

Now she knew why he had not come, and after half a century the glory of his high chivalry thrust itself upon her, blindingly, overwhelmingly.

He had shielded her father from every one—from her—all through those years of her barren pride. He had known what was in her father's letter, placed with the box which he must claim from her. He had left it there among the cobwebs of the Endicotts' strong-room, had abandoned that princely fortune that her father's name, the name of his friend, might be shielded even from her; that she might not know what he had kept locked up within his own breast until death took him out of the world.

He had passed over his opportunity for happiness, knowing well what her father had written in praise of him. And she, too, had passed over her happiness, with such a man, because of her sinful pride.

Miss Attridge picked up with her fluttering old fingers the gorgeous emerald from the edge of the table beside her. She looked at it long and understandingly. That was a man—Eugene. "Folks?" Yes, the Ducettes were "Folks;"—that young Louis Ducette! *He* would have gone overboard with scorn on his lips and in his face set toward the declining sun.

Again she thought of her nephew, Charles Revere Pinckney 3d, and visualized him as he would be about now, stumping along Boylston Street, trying to retain his figure by walking exercises! Charles had always been stodgy—without fire. *He* would never rise to an occasion. *He* would have picked up the emerald and put it back with the rest in the heap on the table. He was commonplace—not like the Ducettes.

She sighed, and turned her beady eyes toward the table and her knitting. She reached out in its direction, her old hand trembling as if with palsy. But it was the letter that she picked up. She held it, close-clasped for an instant, pressed against her fluttering breast. Then, with infinite pains, rising, she tottered over to the fireplace, her eyes on the door lest the vigilant old servant should hear her and come in.

Reaching the fireplace, she leaned heavily against the mantel and drew her father's letter out of its envelope. She separated the sheets, and, crumpling them into a great ball, she struck a match and set the ball afire. She held the match underneath and against corners of the many sheets until it was well alight and then she tossed it into the grate. She watched it burn up brightly and then disintegrate. When it was all consumed she called the maid who came to her, an exclamation, half-suppressed, upon her lips.

Miss Attridge, very erect, gave the maid her arm and silently walked back to her chair. The maid adjusted the India shawl about her shoulders, and handed her mistress her knitting.

WEST OF CHAD

A Complete Novelette by Georges Surdez

Author of "The Ladders of Death," "Outside the Walls," etc.

CHAPTER I

"TRIK EL ABID," announced the guide.

Lieutenant Royer turned in his saddle that he might translate to his commander—

"This is the slave road, Captain Vauclin!"

Running north and south, the trail was more clearly defined than the one on which they had been traveling, marked strongly on the soil, trampled by a million feet. The old slave road, that crosses the Sudan from Nigeria, and goes on to Ghat in Tripoli. Royer evoked the picture of long lines of blacks, still dazed by their sudden expatriation, marching northward to be sold in the North African markets.

He glanced over the dunes, grassy, undulating toward the far-off rim where earth and sky met. The tawny Sudan, for centuries the battle-ground of Arab and negro. And he, Royer, felt a sense of elation, of importance, at being one of the first, the very first in the advance. His tall muscular body was agitated by a shiver of almost dread. He was about to pass the portals into barbarism.

There roamed the famous Rabah Zeir, with his horde of warriors.

The noon-day sun hanging high in the cloudless blue, radiated light. The shadows were gathered at the very feet of the mounts. The tanned faces of his two white companions, as well as the sooty features of the negro infantrymen, glistened alike with sweat. The expressions on all were tense, appeared to reflect his own awe at having overstepped the safety line.

The commander, Captain Vauclin, a diminutive, wiry man, dark of pelt, quick of gesture, laughed softly.

"Here goes!" he said, and urged his horse across the old trail.

Then he lifted his hand and motioned for the others to follow: eighty *Tirailleurs*, a hundred and fifty bearers, each carrying a heavy head burden. Last in line came Lieutenant Lamuse, slumbering on his horse, his heavy face bent low, his chin resting on his chest. His immense shoulders swayed with every step of the little animal. His abnormally short legs depended loosely on either side of the saddle, surmounted by a giant torso.

Royer had long looked forward to this event, the crossing into territory beyond the Trail of the Slaves.

"It'll be months before we see other white men," he said to Captain Vauclin.

"Probably," agreed the other.

"Unless we make a juncture with the forces coming down through the Sahara.

Or again, we may meet the column coming up from the Congo, when we reach Bagirmi."

"When—we—reach—Bagirmi," Vauclin put in. "That's a long way off."

"Thirty days should see us there."

"Unless we meet the playful Rabah. Then we may never reach it."

"Pessimist," chided Royer.

"Perhaps," agreed the other.

Royer saw the evidence of gathering thought on the forehead shaded by the white brim of the helmet.

"Are you satisfied with the army? Don't you sometimes long for a chance to do something big?" Vauclin began.

"I'm satisfied," Royer replied evenly.

"I see. The glory, the gold lace! Suppose you could combine that with something lucrative?"

"Eh?"

"There's a chance to make money here."

Royer looked about him, at the sun-yellowed grass, the tall trees, the immense territory spreading before them, where strength was law. Yes, there was money here; gold, ivory, an immense store of wealth.

"Doesn't tempt me," he said nonchalantly.

Vauclin breathed deeply.

"Listen, Royer! Why does the government want this land? To get the most out of it. You'll work on for nothing, fight, kill, perhaps be killed yourself, for others. Did it ever occur to you to get in on the ground floor, and get the wealth for yourself?"

"But one must have a commercial turn of mind. I haven't that."

Vauclin waved his hand in the air as if to dispel light smoke.

"So much for fine sentiments. Major Camard, at Fort Canrobert, has been in the army thirty years, has been wounded four times, has existed on his pay, been granted medals, intrinsic value fifty francs, and received the small pension attached to the Legion of Honor. Suppose he'd come to this country, or gone to Indo China thirty years ago, to trade? He'd have a fortune! Like a good watch-dog, he's satisfied to live like a monk.

"Through his work, men are owners of palatial mansions in Paris, castles in the Provinces. They smoke Havanas at their clubs, because the Major, with two hundred infantrymen at a sou a day, smashed a few hundred Black Fags in the Tongkin! In that brush perhaps twenty-five privates and officers lost their lives, the only lives they had!" Vauclin grinned ironically. "What did it matter? They had no money. But let a single trader be killed, and the press takes up the fact, runs four columns on the front page, and wonders what we're doing. We're poor watch-dogs, they say; a money-maker has been killed!"

Vauclin pointed to the sweating porters. They grinned when they saw the white officers looking at them.

"They, too, are satisfied with their lot," Vauclin went on. "Had any of those poor —— the ability to give voice to coherent expression, he would tell you: 'I glory in being a porter. That is useful work, for does it not help progress, though I may croak by the trail, like any mangy ox or camel!"

Vauclin ceased speaking, and his face flushed as he glowered into space. His anger mounted.

"And there's another thing money gets you, Royer. No matter what kind of a mess you get into, you can always find some way out, some one to shoulder the blame!"

He turned suddenly to Royer.

"You have heard something about my personal affairs, have you not? Before you started on the expedition?" he demanded. Then, as Royer did not answer immediately: "There's been gossip, I know. You have heard that I was a protégé of Vauclin, my cousin."

"Yes," Royer agreed. "That is common talk."

He wondered why, after two months of constant association, the subject should be brought up. Perhaps Vauclin wanted to establish a more confidential basis. Yes, crossing the Trik el Abid seemed to bring white men together.

"Do you want to hear a little story?"

Royer signified assent.

"In France, I was attached to a garrison near Paris. I drank, played the fool, used to sneak off to the capital for a good time. There was in Paris a certain beautiful lady, a pseudo Polish countess. Chief admirer at her shrine was my cousin, Rene Vauclin. It became known to the Secret Service that madame, for all her beauty, or rather because of it, was an agent, or if you prefer, a spy. My cousin was at that time about to

be assigned secretary in the War Ministry. There were notes, sweet letters, that had to be explained. So he sent for me. I was in the Infantry. I could afford a scandal, he said. He engineered matters so that the letters were attributed to me, and even managed to pull me out of the mess with a mere reprimand, as it was evident no harm had been done. He was grateful, oh, so grateful. And I was transferred to Africa, to the High Niger, two years ago."

Vauclin looked at his finger nails, polished, almond shaped, and laughed softly:

"He did it, I suppose, so that I wouldn't talk. Made me laugh at first. But then the longing to live, to see things, came over me, the loneliness of the outpost nearly crazed me."

Vauclin removed his helmet, showed his bulging forehead, the small features:

"Look!" he said in self-scorn. "Am I an army man?"

"No," Royer was compelled to agree.

"The army was the only career open to me through tradition. My father was a soldier, his father before him. It may be the rough lives they led, the privations they underwent that are counterbalanced within me by this craving for softer things." He shrugged. "I begged repeatedly to be recalled. He promised, that's all. Then I was assigned to this expedition."

Vauclin toyed with his bridle, then briskly asked—

"Do you know why this expedition was sent out?"

"To reach Lake Chad and Bagirmi."

"Yes. And what are the official reasons?"

"England is busy in Egypt, busy in the Transvaal. The Germans are in the Kamerun. The Colonial Conference recently allotted them the left bank of the Shari, a poor location on the lake, fronting on mud flats. They'd like to reach Bagirmi first, get planted there, and hold both banks. We're sent to get ahead of them."

"With eighty *Tirailleurs*, eh?"

"Eighty trained soldiers are not to be disdained."

"Did you ever hear of Rabah Zeir?"

"Yes," assented Royer. "Let's see. Born of a slave mother, his father was a Moslem gentleman living on the border of Egypt and Abyssinia. To lower Egypt came 'Chinese' Gordon, the Englishman. His mission was to help the Egyptians put down slave-running, and incidentally pave the way for British penetration. And Rabah Zeir was engaged in the traffic of human flesh. Against him, Gordon sent out Romolo Dhassi Pasha. There was a battle in which Romolo was successful. Rabah's force was commanded by his half-breed son, risen to freedom. Rabah Zeir senior was killed. The ex-slave decided that the soil was too hot for him. He gathered seven hundred Bazingirs, slave soldiers, a few hundred riders, adopted the name born by his father, and marched across Kordofan, Darfur, invaded the Wadai, then conquered Bagirmi and Bornu. Is that correct?"

"Yes. And around this nucleus of Bazingirs, he has gathered a real army of blacks, while all the slave-traders of the Wadai, Arabs for the greater part, have joined him."

"Our men are better armed, better disciplined." Royer protested.

"Not so. Rabah Zeir took with him from Egypt many modern rifles. In 1891, seven years ago, he caught up with and killed the French explorer, Paul Brandel. On that occasion, he seized three hundred Gras rifles. It is a matter of record, as you have said yourself, that he is in touch with the Germans in the Kamerun. Who is to say how many thousand Mausers have come to him from that direction?"

"European-led troops are better than native-led men."

"A fact that does not hold true in this case, Royer. Rabah has proved an able leader. Constant fighting has given his bands a discipline seldom met with in native forces. It's a mistake to believe all native leaders cast in the same mould."

"It looks bad for us," Royer had to agree, wondering why Vauclin had not referred to the subject before. "But we'll probably join the other expedition in time."

But Vauclin had gone back to his brooding. He turned, and indicated with a lift of his chin the somnolent Lamuse, extinct cigaret between his lips, ambling far in the rear.

"That's a lieutenant!" he pronounced contemptuously. "Such as you see him, he is a commissioned officer of one of the civilized Governments, a leader of two hundred and fifty lower watch-dogs! And why? Why is he so high in the human scale? Because 'Little' Vauclin knows something

about 'Great' Vauclin. 'Great' Vauclin received a letter from me saying, 'I, who know things that you know, that others must not know, would like to have Monsieur Lamuse, a half-witted brute, wear two gold stripes on his coat, instead of one.' And, lo and behold, the extra stripes blossomed on the dingy white sleeves of the great sleeper! Bah——"

Vauclin chuckled.

"And to you, the most powerful man is the general commanding," he went on. "That's what you aspire to. Should you reach the top rung in the army, which is doubtful, you'd find yourself where you started, with some one to command you, the Government, which means the bankers and the capitalists."

Royer was habitually cool. His temperament, capable of rising on occasion, was nevertheless held in an iron grip. But in spite of his command over himself, he felt his poise slipping under this shower of recrimination against the army and the world. Sharp answers trembled on his lips.

But Vauclin lapsed into silence.

CHAPTER II

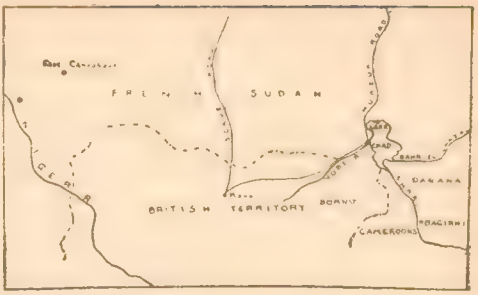
THE party reached Kanda as the sun failed.

The village straggled on the incline of a dune, ascending from a pool lying in the bottom of one of the land depressions, so common in the region, and called by the French *cuvettes*.

Vauclin decided to camp outside the village. The tents for the white officers were erected, the cooking fires lighted. Soon, from each tiny blaze rose a pillar of black smoke, straight for a few feet, then caught by the northeast wind, broke sharply, and, in an immense sooty streak, trailed across the sky.

The cooks, stripped to the waist, squatting before the cast-iron pots, were preparing the evening meal. The soldiers lounged about, a picturesque crowd, half-dressed, in chattering groups. From the village came men, women and children, who stood some distance away, and stared curiously at the strangers.

Lamuse and Vauclin, apart from the others, were conversing in low tones. The captain spoke with animation. Lamuse nodded now and then. His immense torso



showed unlimited strength. His peculiar forehead, receding, covered with bristling, reddish hair, betrayed his primitive nature.

The two approached.

"Warm evening, eh, Royer?" remarked Vauclin.

"Yes, how do you find it, Lamuse?"

"Didn't notice," the lieutenant grumbled shortly.

"Do we need supplies?" Vauclin asked.

"Yes," answered Royer. "Do you want me to get in touch with the chief and present a requisition?"

"I guess that's best," Vauclin assented.

Royer stepped to the nearest fire and called—

"Goualy!"

A great Ouolof got up, a corporal of *Tirailleurs*. He saluted respectfully, waited.

"You savvy these people's talk?"

"Yassah. Mandigo tongue."

"You go find chief. Tell him I want talk."

"Yassah."

The Ouolof ambled off, his baggy trousers, released from the leggings which he wore during the march, hanging loosely about his ankles. He presented an herculean, ridiculous figure.

"I don't like that fellow," Lamuse remarked.

"Why not?"

"Too independent."

"Goualy keeps away from the rest of the men, save those of his own village, because he thinks he's of a superior essence," Royer said lightly. "According to him, his ancestors were kings of forgotten negro kingdoms. Just a pose, that's all."

"He's gloomy," insisted Lamuse, "and I don't like him."

Royer had noticed a vague enmity between the corporal and Lamuse. Lamuse was fond of walking among the *Tirailleurs*, teasing them, playing rough practical jokes.

He had always been met with cold reserve by the big black, who had a certain dignity in his make-up that appealed to Royer.

"Personally, I don't like a native who behaves like a white man," Vauclin put in.

Royer did not reply, for the Ouolof was coming back, accompanied by a gray-haired native, clad in a gorgeous *gandoura* of Sudanese cloth, striped blue and white.

"This, he be chief," Goualy announced. "Ask him whether he has food for us."

Goualy translated, and the chief spoke at length.

"Yes," interpreted the Ouolof. "He'll have food for us noon time tomorrow."

"Too late," Vauclin spoke up.

Goualy again broke into the clicking, hissing native tongue. The chief listened patiently, then replied.

"He says he can give a little tonight, much tomorrow."

"That's not soon enough," Vauclin persisted. "We want to start early in the morning."

Another interlude of native conversation, then Goualy turned to the captain—

"He says no can do."

Vauclin turned to Lamuse—

"Take twenty men and collect what you can from the village."

Lamuse saluted, then, with an unexpectedly quick move, went to the fires. A brief order, and twenty men gathered, rifles in hand, and followed him out of the camp. The chief ran after them, shouting and waving his arms.

The party entered the first street of the little town, and was immediately surrounded by an excited, squealing mob.

"A little more talk would have brought the chief to terms." Royer suggested mildly. "He was merely angling for a present."

"That's what we must avoid. They must understand when we ask for a thing, we intend to have it."

From the village, the uproar increased. The quest from hut to hut had begun. The women were beginning to scream. Then, louder voices, followed by a shot, and a veritable clamor, a tumult of running feet.

Vauclin, his hands clasped behind his back, waited.

More shots resounded in rapid succession, while from the streets came running a disorderly crowd of natives, with soldiers in hot pursuit. The *Tirailleurs* around the fires laughed at the spectacle. Lamuse, having found resistance, was doubtless clearing the town previous to the looting.

The sun sank out of sight. Darkness gathered. The sky turned a deep violet, still streaked with orange glow. And, sharp against this somber background, a column of flames shot upward. Royer was aware of the muffled roar of the blaze, as the first hut was fired.

"You'd better stop him, captain!"

"But, if it amuses him!" Vauclin grinned amiably, and slammed his hand on Royer's shoulder. "Why not let him enjoy himself?"

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Royer, forgetting for the moment the other's rank.

Vauclin apparently did not hear.

"Just think," he said musingly. "What a story to narrate. Night battle with cannibals in the heart of the Sudan. Towns aflame, and so forth!"

The fire spread. Other huts caught, the grass roofs going up in a single, huge gold flame. A canopy of thick smoke formed over the village, extended south before the wind. The shots were increasing, and angry shouts told of fighting men. The women and children had halted in the open, and were contemplating their burning homes.

Impulsively, Royer started forward.

"Lieutenant!" Vauclin recalled him, sharply. "Stay here. That's not your party. In any case it's over. Here he comes."

Driving before them a flock of goats, with chickens tied by the feet and slung around their necks, the foragers returned. Lamuse, in the lead, his usually red face blanched, staggered like a drunken man. He came up to Vauclin.

"The beggars had everything in there," he announced.

"You seem to have had a time, in there." remarked Vauclin, indicating the collar torn open, the revolver in his hand.

"They started it, captain. Hit one of the *Tirailleurs*. Believe me, I didn't hesitate, then!"

"Anybody hurt?"

"There's a bunch of dead ones in the village."

"I mean among our men?"

"The first man hit: knife cut across the wrist. One or two others scratched."

"Oh, that's all right, then."

Lamuse threw himself into a folding-chair, wiped his hands on a handkerchief.

The camp was in confusion. The pillaging had not stopped at food. The returning men carried all sorts of household utensils, and one of them possessed four of the huge, copper pans, so precious to the native housewife. These he placed upon the ground and beat a hearty tom-tom.

It was customary for the three white officers to dine together. When the cook informed them that the meal was ready, Royer followed the others into Vauclin's tent.

Lamuse, for the first time, was talkative, and related the details of the fight in the village. When the orderly brought in the coffee, Lamuse gulped his down, then, picking up the brandy bottle, poured out a full cup. Vauclin, with the benign expression of a father watching a prankish child, encouraged the big man's boasting.

Royer endured all in silence. He could say nothing, do nothing. Any reprimand must come from Vauclin. He held no authority over Lamuse. And yet, the killings had been unnecessary and cruel. In the Niger posts, and in Algeria, he had heard like tales, but he had never expected to witness such an orgy.

Dinner over, the three stepped outside. The huts were still burning, and lighted up the countryside. The grinning soldiers, intensely black in the raw light, wore a new expression of ferocity. With but a thin veneer of civilization, plunder, to them, was the natural sequence of power.

A *Tirailleur* came to Lamuse, spoke.

"What do you think of that!" Lamuse exclaimed, turning to Vauclin. "Another porter caught stealing cartridges!"

"It's time to act," Vauclin said.

The thief was brought forward, guarded by two privates. Again, Goualy did the translating. Yes, the porter admitted the theft. Why? This he could not answer. Royer knew the primitive man's desire for a bright object, an attraction as resistless as the flash of a mirror to a skylark.

Lamuse went over to the baggage pile where the ammunition cases were under guard. He opened one of them. Then, the big lieutenant returned, took a scarf from one of the guards, wrapped it about the porter's face, covering the eyes, winding the cloth tightly, turban fashion.

The soldiers stared with parted lips at the strange behavior of the white man. In the red glow, Royer saw that Lamuse laughed quietly to himself. He wondered what joke he was about to play.

"Tell him to run straight ahead when I give him a push," he ordered Goualy.

Goualy obeyed. Lamuse went to the nearest fire, took a blazing stick from the heap. Royer saw him insert an object in the folds of the scarf, touch this with the lighted brand. Then Lamuse gave the native a shove, sent him forward, running, stumbling blindly against protruding roots.

An explosion—a dazzling flash——

Dynamite, a fuse, fire!

Lamuse turned to Goualy—

"Tell the others, when they want cartridges to come to me!"

The *Tirailleurs* laughed. This, to them, was high comedy. And another reason for unquestioning loyalty to Lamuse.

For a moment, Royer stared, trembling, his anger seething. His voice sounded strange when he exclaimed—

"That's murder!"

Lamuse threw his head back and laughed.

"An accusation of murder in Central Africa?" he queried. "What about every explorer? Is the killing of a native considered murder?"

"You went too far," Vauclin reproved sharply. "There was no need of killing him."

Lamuse shrugged, then left for his tent.

"He's a brute," said Vauclin to Royer. "But he may prove valuable."

Still shaken, Royer walked to the nearest fire, sat down, and remained silent. Vauclin followed him.

"Listen, Royer, I have plans. If you are intelligent you'll see what I mean. Here we are, three white men. Two of us have brains. Lamuse is a living muscle, no mind to interfere with anything we want him to do. The Sudan is a gold mine." The little captain hesitated, then plunged ahead resolutely:

"I intend to use my eighty men, and strike into the most populous belt. Instead of progressing west, toward Rabah, I'll establish a Sultanate of my own, exploit it for all it's worth, make allies of the chiefs——"

"An idiotic scheme!" Royer replied, scarcely believing his ears.

"Greatest opportunity ever offered a man!"

"You can't be serious, captain?"

Vauclin's stooped shoulders straightened. His stature seemed to increase under his inner resolution. And, for a brief second, Royer perceived the genuine mettle of the man, warped of soul though he was.

"I'm serious. Tomorrow I strike south toward Kano and Bornu!"

Royer's imagination staggered under the complexity of this plot. If Vauclin had been sent on a mission of certain death, then indeed, he was more justified in his desertion—if desertion can ever be justified. But his words lacked the ring of truth. This reason for the expedition had paled beneath Vauclin's greed, the picture he painted of the wealth he could amass. It was more than likely that, had "Great" Vauclin not entered into the scene at all, "Little" Vauclin would have attempted this desertion. Royer stole a quick glance at this diminutive Cortez, who would hew for himself a kingdom from the raw Sudan. He shook his head in amazement.

"You're liable to arrest for desertion."

"But, if I go to another country? One can not be extradited for desertion from the army. Come, Royer, drop the indignant attitude. Forget this petty episode over the porter. They had to have their lesson. Admit frankly, you want to come with us. I don't like you overmuch, but I need a second. And you know Arabic. Studied it, I presume, to further your career. Well, here's your chance."

With the end of his whip, he stirred the embers of the fire.

"Royer, you still fear that this venture will end in ultimate capture and the firing-squad. Forget it! In two years, I'll think of a way to sell out, and make my escape through Egypt or Abyssinia."

He explained at length. The smoldering town crackled and spat behind them with the hot breath of a furnace. The *Tirailleur* still beat his tom-tom, and, in the midst of a group of privates, Lamuse stood talking.

"Lamuse has gained the troopers over to us," Vauclin declared. "I see you hesitate. Very well, sleep over it. There are two roads open to you, one of which is the right one. In fact, I don't see but you've got to go on with us!"

With this parting admonition, he got up and went to his tent.

Alone, Royer endeavored to fight out this problem. There seemed to be no loophole. Suppose he accepted Vauclin's proposition, pretended to be willing to go on with the scheme? And then tried to make his escape. Why had Vauclin not thought of that? He gave up trying to explain the captain's motives and plans.

There was nothing impossible in this scheme to create a Sultanate. Two Frenchmen, mad, one with the desire for power, the other with sheer animal lusts, could do more harm to France than Rabah Zeir and all his riflemen. Vauclin might establish himself, and then make terms with the first foreign power to arrive on the spot—most likely Germany. This would mean a Colony lost.

From time to time, Royer glanced at his watch. But ten minutes had elapsed in intervals he had thought to be hours. Two o'clock, three o'clock. The air freshened somewhat as always before daybreak.

THE precipitated, alert notes of reveille sounded at sunrise. The porters got into line, ready for the start. The *Tirailleurs* took their accustomed places. Then, motionless, awaited orders.

Vauclin came to Royer.

"What have you decided?"

"I shall not go with you," Royer said shortly.

Vauclin shrugged, and turned to Lamuse—

"All right, lieutenant, speak to them."

Lamuse stepped out, and called the *Tirailleurs* before him. Surprized, they gathered into line, leaving the staring porters behind.

Lamuse addressed them in French, then in Mandigo, which he spoke passably. He informed the blacks that Vauclin and himself would lead them down into populous country where they would be more amply rewarded for their fighting, would be allowed to pillage as their fathers before them had done. He played on their racial pride, spoke of their ancestors who had known how to wrest a good living from the Sudan, flashed before their eyes a future with glorious fighting, followed by orgies. And Royer knew that Vauclin had prepared this speech, yes, had even calculated the opening debauch in this very village.

Spellbound, accustomed to accept the white man's word as law, the troopers applauded, shouted. Plunder for individual

benefit was reproved, even severely punished by the usual white officer.

"Those who want to come with us, get back into line," Lamuse concluded. "The others can stay here, as dogs afraid to fight."

The soldiers returned to their posts along the porters' formation, grinning, joking among themselves. In their childish simplicity they saw the good points, but none of the risks. Living from day to day they had no thought of the morrow. In any case, they reasoned, the danger would be no greater than along the route already planned. And were they not obeying their officers?

But one man stayed behind: Goualy.

Almost insolent in his independence of bearing, he stood, rooted to his place, his piece grounded, his eyes straight ahead, staring unwaveringly at Lamuse. And when they saw that Goualy was standing his ground, five of the men from his own village came back and lined up beside him.

"And you?" questioned Lamuse, stepping closer. "You are not coming with us."

"No, *mon* lieutenant."

"Why not?"

"I will stay with the other officer," he indicated Royer, with a pointing finger.

"How do you know he is not coming with us?"

"I know——"

Lamuse whitened, but Vauclin gave him a warning glance.

"You have put it up to them, Lamuse," he said. "The others will see that we force no one. They already realize it is to their advantage to follow us."

"I wanted to tame that fellow," the lieutenant said, sullenly.

"There's seventy-five others," Vauclin suggested, then went on sarcastically. "And our brother officer can not be left alone." He turned to Royer. "Before another day has passed, you'll have decided to come after us. In the meantime, *au revoir*——"

"It's still time for *you* to change your mind," Royer retorted.

It was Vauclin's turn now to shake his head. He strode to his horse and mounted with an impressive show of determination.

"Talk all you want, Royer—I've crossed the Rubicon!"

Lamuse mounted in his turn. A brief order and the party was under way, southward.

Royer followed the procession with his eyes, until the last porter had outlined against the sky at the top of a far dune, and disappeared. The ruined village was still smoking. Ahead, there would be many more—unless Vauclin was caught or killed.

"Goualy, we will return," he said.

"We can not now. The people of the village fled west, and seeing us so few, after what was done yesterday, they would attack. We must go ahead."

Yes, Vauclin had planned well!

Behind was a population excited to a killing pitch by the burning and pillage. Ahead spread the unknown Sudan. There was small chance that he could find the expedition from Algeria. But he was compelled forward by the force of circumstances.

An immense sense of loneliness came over him, a longing to strike out toward the right, to catch up with Vauclin and Lamuse, to have white companions, a sense of security. But the blood in a man will tell.

"That's right, Goualy," he agreed, and mounted.

Followed by the ridiculous escort, he started toward the east.

The trail ran on endlessly, to the shimmering horizon.

CHAPTER III

BEN HAMZA laughed, his keen browned face wrinkling deeply. He was young, strong and brave and pillaging in the Sudan was profitable business.

Caravans start from Mursuk, in Tripoli, for the Bornu and Sokoto regions twice a year. These bi-annual expeditions bring down print-cloth, salt and arms to the negro communities. This particular outfit, the first in eighteen months, was a large one, due, no doubt, to the belief that Rabah Zeir was engaged in the Bagirmir region.

The guards of the caravan, fifty or sixty or more, paid scum from the Tripoli hinterland, with nothing of the warrior save the weapons, had made but a weak resistance. The whitish smoke of their discharges still hung in the air, in great shreds torn by the wind. The raiders had scorned to fire,

arriving like a thunderbolt from behind a sheltering dune.

Ben Hamza looked on with pride at the immense booty gathered and thought of old Rabah Zeir and his elation. Probably he, Hamza, would get a large part, for had he not suggested this bold stroke across country?

Once more he congratulated himself on having joined Rabah peacefully, for in Rabah's service he had amassed more than he could have ever hoped as Sultan of Dagana, a title inherited from his father who had held the land by right of conquest.

"STOP! Stop!"

Ben Hamza looked up at the sudden warning.

A camel, mounted by a negro, had broken away from the main body and was covering the ground with long strides. Instead of the usual bale of merchandise, the beast was laden with a huge coffer-like *bassur*, in which women travel, sheltered from the bold glances of the curious. Hamza laughed at the stupidity of this attempted escape.

He urged his horse forward, then governed by the passion of the chase, he outstripped the other pursuers. The rapping of his stallion's hoofs on the hard soil, drummed steadily.

"Stop!" he shouted, and loosened the long carbine.

The slave peered around the *bassur*. Hamza fired and missed. He worked the bolt, slid in another cartridge, fired again. The distance was too great and the combined motion of his own mount and that of the camel made accurate aim impossible.

Rapid beating of hoofs grew more distinct in the rear. He turned and saw Fader el Aziz, son of Rabah Zeir, galloping close behind.

"A race?" Ben Hamza suggested.

The young man did not answer but urged his mount. Ben Hamza smiled goodnaturedly. He and Rabah's son were friendly enough but there had always existed a certain amount of rivalry between them and Hamza usually won.

"Fifty douros for my share!" el Aziz shouted.

Ben Hamza regarded the prize: the camel was old, the *bassur* not over new. He had no need of slaves. As for women, he already possessed the four spouses prescribed by the scriptures.

"Agreed!" he called out. "Go ahead, el Aziz!"

In spite of reiterated challenges, the slave kept on. Rabah's son, coming alongside, pressed the muzzle of his rifle against the flank of the camel and fired. The animal's head went up. The slave was shaken off and slid to the ground. The camel jumped about awkwardly, squealing with pain.

"Clear off, he's falling!" warned ben Hamza.

The sides of the *bassur* splintered. Something rolled out, something alive, that got up on two feet and ran in circles. El Aziz dismounted and approached the woman. He grasped her by the shoulder and tore the veil from her face.

Ben Hamza moved closer, then he leaned back against the high saddle and shook with irrepressible laughter.

"Thou hast caught thy grandmother!" he exclaimed.

El Aziz, looked up, in his face a curious mixture of amusement and disappointment.

"By the prophet, ben Hamza, I thought she would prove an *houri* from the fear she showed of us!"

The old woman looked at el Aziz in supplication. The slave drew near.

"Who is she?" demanded el Aziz.

"She is a widow," the negro replied. "And her relatives are in Bornu, so, her sons send her back to her people."

"Why didst thou run?" put in ben Hamza. "There was no cause for fear."

"My mistress so ordered and I but obeyed."

El Aziz decided to laugh and made a gesture of unconcern.

"Accompany her back to the caravan, thou," he ordered the slave.

He turned to his horse and mounted and rode around the dead camel. He lifted the hangings with the muzzle of his gun, then shook his head.

"Nothing of value," he announced. "Not enough to pay my sweat."

"And you thought the *bassur* held a beautiful maid!"

"Is it seemly for a woman of that age to fear a man?"

"Is it seemly for any age?" retorted ben Hamza. "Come, Fader el Aziz, we must go back."

They rode toward the halting caravan.

"Thy father will be pleased," Hamza offered. "Indeed, there are many weapons, and cloth and food, not to mention the camels."

"Our share will be considerable, ben Hamza."

"But I will be most pleased with the fifty douros thou wilt pay me."

"Fifty douros!" questioned el Aziz. "I shall pay thee fifty douros?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"My share. Didst thou not agree?"

"But there was no share. The camel is dead, the *bassur* broken, the contents worthless."

"Had the capture been accomplished in a more skilful manner," ben Hamza suggested gently, "the camel would not have died nor the *bassur* been broken."

"But the woman would have been old! And 'twas for her I offered to pay."

Ben Hamza was not greedy. Perhaps, had the young man offered to pay, he would have refused. Not even tempered at best, the excitement of the day had rendered him more irritable.

"Thou didst not mention what was in thy head. Fifty douros thou hast promised. Fifty douros shalt thou pay."

"No."

"Then I shall make a liar out of thy father's son!"

El Aziz did not answer at once. Apparently he sought no quarrel with the truculent ben Hamza, but wished to find a way to escape payment.

"I'll tell thee, ben Hamza. This is a question to be decided by a wiser head than ours.

"I am willing to refer to any *marabout*, or *taleb*, or even our friends. Fifty douros for my share meant fifty douros whatever the catch brought. Had the prize been worth two hundred, still you would have given me but fifty?"

El Aziz thought further:

"My father is to join us in three days," he said. "To go on, as thou knowest, to meet the Roumis which are said to come from the west. I shall put the question to him."

"Thou art the son of his old age, so 'tis said," spoke ben Hamza, who had lost his calm. "he sees in thee the sun, the moon and the stars. He will say thou art right."

"Insults to my father!" exclaimed el Aziz.

"No, I repeat what is everywhere said. If I but repeat——"

"I reck no one!" shouted ben Hamza. "No one shall still my tongue nor bridle me—be he thyself or thy father!"

"Bold talk!"

The two had taken no notice of others of their companions who had learned of the episode from the slave, and had come to join in the laugh. The rising voices were regarded with concern. The chieftain's son made the last remark before witnesses. Ben Hamza saw the others waiting for his answer. He deliberately chose the words that lashed,

"There is nought of the slave in me, el Aziz, therefore I talk as I wish to all men!"

Rabah Zeir's son showed by his thickened lips and nostrils the far-off strain of negro blood. Ben Hamza was a pure Arab, descended from Algerian stock and proud of his race. His tone, as well as his words, was insulting.

An elderly Arab, Si Lahal by name, distantly related to ben Hamza, who served him as advisor, intervened.

"Stop this talk which leads nowhere," he said. "What is the trouble?"

Ben Hamza told his story. El Aziz told his. The old man's forehead wrinkled beneath his green turban.

"Thy word is given, el Aziz," he concluded. "Fifty douros dost thou owe ben Hamza."

"Not until my father reaches us," insisted el Aziz.

"What! Hast thou no money?" questioned the counselor, pretending to misunderstand the other's motives.

"I have. But I will not pay."

"Listen, el Aziz, I care not for silver pieces," ben Hamza put in. "But admit that you owe me the fifty douros, and thy debt is paid."

El Aziz hesitated.

"I will not admit the debt," he said.

"Even after the old man has spoken?"

"Even after that. Because I am among thy men, thou hast tried to browbeat me. Know this, slave or no slave, I am as much of a man as thou."

"That may be," agreed ben Hamza. "Were thy beard grown I might consent to fight thee."

A general laugh went up. The blood

rushed to the younger man's face. His eyes blazed.

"Rabah Zeir will speak to thee concerning this!"

The old man again spoke:

"El Aziz, if thy father learns of this, there will be a quarrel between him and ben Hamza. Either settle the thing thyself by admitting the debt, which will thereby be cancelled, or fight with Hamza."

El Aziz took refuge behind an excuse.

"My father does not stand for fighting among ourselves," he said. "And I, his son, greatly provoked though I be, obey him."

"Then say nothing to him. We bear thee no ill-will. We want to stay with Rabah Zeir. If we leave, many others will leave also, and Rabah will be left alone to face the Roumis when they arrive. Come, tell us there will be no talk of this to Rabah Zeir."

"No use," ben Hamza put in. "He would not keep his word."

"If he promises by Allah, he will," some one suggested.

"If a man has it in him not to keep his word, swearing by Allah will not alter," said ben Hamza. "I have bowed to Zeir. I serve him. But, *in cha Allah*, I will not serve a son who seems to have had a woman for a father!"

"Come, ben Hamza," Si Lahal said. "If the boy will not give up his anger, forget thine. He is two years thy junior."

But el Aziz had ridden away to join his own followers, perhaps fifty in number, a fourth of the expedition. Those of his men who had listened to the conversation followed.

"Better make peace," the old man suggested. "For otherwise, thou wilt have his father to deal with."

"Dost know, respectable man, that one insult swallowed paves the way for more, that if I give in today, the young fool will repeat himself tomorrow?"

"He has not insulted thee."

"No, he has stolen fifty douros from me!"

"I shall pay them for him if you will make peace. No man in this land can bear Rabah Zeir's enmity."

"Aside from Allah, I fear no one!"

"Courage and wisdom sometimes march apart. And thy people, thy tents, are behind Rabah Zeir. If we fight against him, we lose all."

"Not all, for manhood is left us." Ben Hamza turned to the others—young men, warriors. "Which do you prefer? Injustice or the loss of your belongings?"

"Thy quarrel is ours."

"I will make one more attempt to reach an understanding with el Aziz. If that be refused, we break with Rabah Zeir. The Sudan is great. There is room for all!"

He raised his hand.

"El Aziz!" he shouted.

"Yes——"

"Forget this silly quarrel. Let us go back to thy father with this!" He indicated the captured caravan.

"I ride no more with thee," answered el Aziz. "If, as thou dost say, the caravan belongs to my father, I will later escort it back to him. You can await here for Rabah's decision."

"He has received bad counsel," murmured the old man.

Ben Hamza turned to his men.

"I have done all I could," he said.

Then, with a volubility only an Arab can summon, he poured insults on the son of Rabah Zeir, descending down the course of time to his earliest ancestors.

El Aziz was seen to signal his men, and they moved off, first at a trot, then breaking into a wild gallop, followed by cries of derision from ben Hamza's followers.

"What now?" asked the old man.

"I'll summon my negroes, who are six hours march away, and wait for Rabah Zeir."

"Can you hope to fight, with four hundred rifles, and two hundred horsemen? Zeir has three times that number."

"One can always fight."

"Think well, whether thou wilt not parley first. The French are coming from the west, Rabah is in the east."

"Allah is great, and a man can but pray," retorted ben Hamza calmly.

And when the sun sank, at the *mohgreb* prayer, ben Hamza knelt devotedly on his rug and prayed with the simplicity of a child. And in his disturbed heart slowly penetrated a confidence, a belief in success, confidence that creates miracles, which has a strength more potent than the sword.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER a swift march to avoid the villagers, Royer and his men thought of turning north, circling Kanda and marching back toward the Niger. Goualy, who had traveled through the

country in his early youth before joining the French Native Infantry, advised that they keep northeast nearly as far as the Murzuk caravan route, then strike due west.

They had but few encounters, and these with isolated men who fled at their approach. They avoided the villages, for Goualy claimed they had been warned by drum-talk, the beat of the tom-tom which forms the telegraphic system in Central Africa. Fourteen days after the separation from Vauclin, Royer was certain that the Murzuk road was not far. He questioned Goualy, who agreed that the turn could now be attempted. The move was postponed until morning.

At daybreak Goualy announced the approach of horsemen.

Royer, with field-glasses, perceived a troop of riders filing over a ridge. The corporal and his five men prepared their rifles. But Royer, who had dealt with Arabs in Algeria, was confident a parley might be engaged. He knew the fallacy of the common belief in useless massacre. White men who had surrendered to native chiefs had many times been spared. Captain Gallieni had been held a year by the Senegalese leader, Ahmadou. Chinese Gordon had been a prisoner in Abyssinia, and both had come out of the adventure with their lives. With his six men, he had no chance to fight, while diplomacy might serve him in good stead.

So, quieting his men, when the Arabs came within hailing distance, he shouted:

"Greetings! Come in peace."

The riders halted some twenty-five yards away and conferred. Then a lone man rode forward. He was a huge, bearded fellow, with tiny eyes peering from between puffy rolls of flesh. He smiled good-naturedly.

"Greetings, Frenchman!" he said. "I am Bu Kach, Bu Kach the well-named."

Bu Kach literally means, "Father Belly," and the rider deserved the name. His obesity was astounding in an Arab.

"What seek you here, thou and thy men?" Bu Kach went on.

"But to return to our village," Royer replied.

Bu Kach rubbed his stomach affectionately:

"Eh, Frenchman, it is too late. Now that I have thee, thou shalt come with me."

"Where?"

"To the tents."

"Ah!"

Goualy touched Royer on the elbow:

"Heed him not. It is a common trick."

"What dost thou fear, Black Face?" asked Bu Kach, contemptuously.

"I'll go," Royer agreed. "Whom dost thou serve?"

"Myself first, my chief after. Ask no more questions, but take patience."

The other horsemen approached and surrounded the *Tirailleurs*. Royer congratulated himself on this respite. A conversation once started, there was no danger of a collision. Whoever Bu Kach served, would first talk and, between sane men, speech avoids fighting.

The fat Arab led the way.

He spoke of many things, but remained mute concerning Rabah Zeir, his activities, and would not say that he did not serve him. For all his jovial appearance, he had a keen mind, and was not easily tricked into unguarded speech.

The camp, composed of many tents, was crowded with men. Bu Kach, riding in the lead, did not answer the curious questions fired at him from all sides by the Arabs who crowded close when they saw a European, and the men who were evidently serving him. Before the central tent Bu Kach drew rein, dismounted, grunting in the effort, and strode within, rolling on his fat limbs.

He reappeared almost immediately.

"Mohammed ben Hamza, Sultan of Dagana, is within. Pray follow."

And Royer obeyed.

His first sentiment with regard to ben Hamza was one of liking. But he saw plainly the feeling was not returned. The Arab, frowning, sat on a heap of pillows, cross-legged, smoking, not the usual water-pipe, but a cigaret. Royer, whose provisions had been exhausted for some days, immediately craved a smoke. This puerile desire, coming before a concern for his life, made him smile.

He told ben Hamza his name and frankly related his adventure. The Arab listened quietly without interruption, then indicated that he might sit. Royer did so, and eagerly accepted the cigaret offered him. He waited for the chief's first words.

"It so happens that I have thee," began ben Hamza, "and I may kill thee or save thee, eh?"

"Yes."

Ben Hamza absent-mindedly twisted the silk cordons of the curtain behind him.

"I take pity on thee," he said gravely. "Thou shalt not be slain."

Royer smiled.

"I have come in peace to demand protection and shelter. Hospitality forbids that I be slain."

"Granted," said ben Hamza shortly. "For that is the law."

He was silent for some minutes.

"Thou art a leader among thy people?" he next asked.

"Yes."

"That is good. I have prayed for help. And it has come."

"You mean—me?"

"Yes, thou. Listen. I have heard, so have all men heard, that thy people learn to battle as others learn to write and read. Is it so?"

"In so much as a man learns anything," said Royer.

Ben Hamza then related his recent quarrel with Rabah Zeir's son. He concluded—

"Rabah Zeir is as much thy enemy as mine, is he not?"

"Yes."

"I do not like thee. I hold no love for any *Roumi*. But when two weaknesses make one strength, likes and dislikes must be forgotten."

"Yes."

"I have less men than Rabah. My head is not as old as his. Perhaps, thou couldst advise me."

"How?"

"He will come up soon. I must fight him."

Royer saw a chance to help his country indirectly. Any blow struck at Rabah Zeir was a blow struck for the French, for ultimately Rabah and the expeditions would meet. In any case, he had no choice.

"How many men hast thou?"

"Four hundred on foot, perhaps two hundred and fifty riders. There are more in Bargirmi, but Rabah is between me and them."

"Those we will not count," the lieutenant said briefly. "And Rabah Zeir, how many does he have with him?"

"Five hundred horsemen at least, and eight hundred rifles."

Royer whistled softly.

"When will he arrive?" he next asked.

"In a day. His advance guard is ahead of him a few hours, waiting for him to attack."

"How many in the advance guard?"

"As many as I have."

"Thou couldst attack the advance guard now, destroy it, and wait for Rabah, who would then have no more than thee."

"If I attack, the advance guard would move back slowly on the main body, and I would have all against me. I have thought of that."

Royer hesitated before he went on.

"Listen, ben Hamza," he said. "I will help, if thou sayest thou wilt not fight the French."

"I can not say," replied ben Hamza. "But I know. Unless I am helped by thee, I kill thee."

"Ah!"

"It is my right."

"All right! I'd better help thee! That's agreed."

"It is agreed."

Royer reached into the inner-pocket of his tunic and drew out a map. This he unfolded and showed to ben Hamza.

"Do you understand this paper?"

"Yes, it is a map."

Royer indicated a line of dots on the colored sheet.

"Look well. This is the Chad. This line indicates Trik el Abid, this other the Murzuk road, near which we now are. Couldst mark our present position?"

Hamza pored over the map for some time, then taking Royer's pencil, made a clumsy mark. At least the Arab understood. There was nothing strange in this. Arabs have known maps from earliest times. But Royer was gratified at ben Hamza's accuracy.

"This map is too small to show all details," Royer went on. "I'll take this spot as the center of another map." On the back of a letter he rapidly sketched an enlargement of the vicinity. "Here," he said. "Mark the spot where the advance guard of Rabah is now."

Ben Hamza pondered, measured with his thumb, mumbled beneath his breath. At length made the desired mark.

"Good," Royer stated. "Where were Rabah Zeir's main forces at last report?"

"Here!" ben Hamza showed no hesitation.

"And how long ago was that?"

"Yesterday when the sun rose."

"Thirty hours. Thou knowest how fast Rabah proceeds on the march?"

"He will hurry for he is angered. He will be here."

He made another dot.

"Being so near at sundown, will he not keep on, in spite of the darkness, to join his advance guard and attack you in the morning?"

Ben Hamza chuckled with excitement.

"True, true! Thou knowest Zeir as though he were thy father!"

"Are the riflemen trustworthy?"

"My father's men before being mine."

"I thought perhaps the fame of Rabah's men would frighten them."

"They, too, have fought under Rabah. They have fought with the Bazingirs against others, and know themselves to be as brave and steady."

"It is well. Now, show me the men."

The two stepped out together, and Bu Kach, who was standing outside, emitted a gasp of surprize when he saw ben Hamza and the white officer on friendly terms. Goualy broke into a grin.

Ben Hamza led the way to the camp of the Blacks and spoke to the leaders. The men grouped. There were members of several tribes: Sokoros, Gaberis, Somrais, Saras. Royer was attracted by the size of the latter. He was not familiar with the different tribes of the Dagana and Bagirmi regions. Ben Hamza called off the names.

"I like the Saras," said Royer.

"So did Rabah," smiled ben Hamza. "See! Each has a good rifle, which he gave to them. They came up from the Kamerun, the rifles. Rabah will be fought with his own gifts."

Royer looked closer.

"A Mauser!" he muttered.

"There came also many knives to be used with them," said ben Hamza. "They are in the baggage."

"Send for one and I will show thee why."

Ben Hamza spoke to Bu Kach who had followed close behind.

"I know they are to be put to the end of the rifle. But Rabah does not use them. He has his spearmen."

"With a knife at the end of a gun, a man can be both rifleman and spearman? Didst notice my men?"

"Yes. That's why I spoke."

Bu Kach came back with a bayonet, which Royer inserted in the groove at the end of the barrel. He then demonstrated the upward blow of the butt, following the thrust. After procuring ben Hamza's consent, he summoned Goualy and charged him with the instruction of the Saras in the use of the "*coupe-coupe*" as Goualy nicknamed the blade.

This precipitation seemed necessary. Action, if to prove successful, must be immediate. The obedient blacks could learn much in a few hours. The *Tirailleurs*, delighted at the turn of things, set to work. The Saras had rudimentary knowledge of both Mandigo and Arabic, as did the troopers, and the difficulty of speech was not an important one. Royer was presented to the two leaders of the Saras, and unable to remember their names further than a group of weird syllables, identified them to ben Hamza as "Tick" and "Tack."

Ben Hamza talked to the other leaders and told them how, in answer to repeated demands, help had come.

"What are we going to do?" asked an old man, Si Lahal, dropping from the first elation over the coming of a European leader, to reality.

Ben Hamza looked at Royer. True, fine words and agreement were not sufficient. He must justify the Arab's trust. He was a general, *de facto*, for was he not to lead hundreds of men in a genuine campaign! He took out the map he had drawn and gravely studied it.

"Ben Hamza, I think I know a way to beat Rabah for the time being. It is a gamble. But it may work. Will you take a chance?"

"Speak," ben Hamza said, undecided. "Speak, that we may hear."

Royer took his place in the center of a circle of attentive listeners, and in his halting Arabic attempted to make the situation clear, his plan plausible. He was questioned. He repeated over and over, and at last seemed to gain approval. One by one the chiefs nodded, convinced. Ben Hamza got up in his turn and placed his hand on Royer's shoulder.

"Make it clear on the paper," he suggested.

Royer, with the point of the pencil, indicated the various moves. Ben Hamza went from one to the other, explained in his turn, painstakingly, assigning each man a certain task. After a long parley the council broke up.

Thirty minutes later the bulk of ben Hamza's forces were on the way, leaving tents and baggage behind, while a smaller force moved toward the advance guard of Rabah Zeir.

Lieutenant Royer, oblivious of Vauclin and Lamuse, rode boot to boot with Mohammed ben Hamza.

CHAPTER V

NIGHT fell.

In spite of the darkness, the outfit kept on at a rapid pace. There was no moon, and the men could hardly be distinguished six feet away. Before the column, the scattered scouts picked out the easiest route through the underbrush and knee-high grass. Between two bodies of infantry, rode the cavalry, the way cleared, when occasion demanded, by the knives of the foot-men.

There was little conversation, each man strained and expectant. A vibrancy seemed to emanate from the mass, a nervously keyed energy. Desultory rifle firing from the right told that the party detached to engage the advance guard was skirmishing around the outposts. Slowly the sounds of the shots grew fainter and Royer knew they had turned the left wing of the enemy position.

The men formed a procession of fantoms in the obscurity.

"The hour?" questioned ben Hamza.

Royer drew out his watch, pressed the crown. The lid snapped, the insignificant noise sounding high in the monotone of shuffling feet. He struck a match.

"Three hours after sundown," he replied.

He saw ben Hamza's teeth flash, then the match went out.

"Rabah Zeir is only four hours away, if he has marched after the setting of the sun also," said the Arab. "But, make no more light. It might be seen, Frenchman."

Royer indicated the giant trees, looming blacker against the black night, which lay between the party and possible enemy scouts.

Ben Hamza laughed softly.

Brief commands and the pace increased. The marching was not rhythmical, as that of trained troops, for the negros shuffled. A man dropped now and then, fell by the wayside. The fast pace was telling. Since four that afternoon there had been no interval of rest. The men in poor condition staggered and were helped by their comrades. The orders were strict. All were to keep along until the end. There were to be no stragglers. Those who were unable to proceed were examined by their leaders, and permitted to seek shelter in the bushes, with orders not to light a fire, or move about after the passing of the column.

From the crest of a hill, Royer was aware of a faint reflection against the sky, doubtless a village in the valley, with an out-post of Rabah's men to keep contact between advance guard and the main body. Then the lights disappeared as the party dipped into the depression. Miles were covered. Instead of slowing up, the men seemed to have caught some of ben Hamza's excitement.

Now and then, from ahead, came the soft call of a scout, indicating a trail which offered easy progress. Royer, who that morning had commanded six men, now led five hundred! Fortune had come his way. It was unbelievable that so great a shift of Fate could have taken place within so short a time. Of course, ben Hamza needed him. But he admired the Arab's lack of false pride which allowed him to seek help from a *Roumi*.

Unseen animals went crashing heavily through the bush, disturbed by the men.

"Halt!" the word was passed along the line, and the column stood motionless.

"The riders will drop out here," said ben Hamza. "This is the place agreed upon."

The horsemen dismounted, held their mounts in the shelter of the trees, and ben Hamza gave them final instructions. He dare not bring them closer to the enemy.

Royer dismounted in his turn, and handed his bridle to one of the cavalrymen.

"I am going on with the riflemen," he said to ben Hamza.

"And so am I."

They followed the blacks, coming up the depression's slope to a ridge. The Somrais, Sokoros, Gilreis, were scattered along the ridge, a few feet apart. The Saras, Royer had kept in solid formation for they were to form the attacking force.

He squatted by ben Hamza's side and waited.

"Nothing yet," he breathed. "Could he have decided to wait until morning?"

"Not likely. He is old, but impetuous."

Royer tried to read the time, but the

crystal showed, vaguely polished, and he could not distinguish the hands.

All was silent. There was no indication of the three hundred men hidden in the bush clumps that dotted the ridge. As for the Saras, they were lying prone, and Royer, who knew of their presence in the open space, could neither hear nor see them. It was nothing short of marvelous, their perfect obedience. Not a gun-barrel rattled on accouterment, not a cough, not even a grunt from the hundred warriors.

Ben Hamza seized Royer's arm, and pressed his fingers deep into the flesh.

"Hear?" he whispered.

A vague murmur came from the southeast, slowly increasing in volumn. Then a steady chanting, first faint, then swelling into greater precision.

"The Bazingirs! They sing on the march."

Royer thrilled. He was the first of the Frenchmen from the west to hear the awe-inspiring song of the slave soldiers.

"It will succeed," he whispered. "Things are working our way."

"If Allah wills," said ben Hamza piously. But his tone was triumphant, and showed no sign of meekness.

A rustling from the bushes. The blacks had heard the chant and were mechanically bracing for the coming conflict.

"Art sick?" whispered ben Hamza.

Royer realized that he trembled from nervousness. His palms were moist, his temples throbbed, his heart pumped in great far-spaced knocks within his ribs."

"No, I am but eager."

Ben Hamza grunted.

"They seem quite near, ben Hamza."

"They are yet far. The night is still, and sound carries. Luckily they do not expect us, and their own sounds drown out ours."

"I think they are quite near," insisted Royer.

"No, they are yet a long way off."

Royer realized that the Arab's trained ear was better than his own.

"Thou must give the signal," he said, handing him his revolver.

"Yes," agreed ben Hamza.

The plan was a simple one.

Royer realized the weakness of Rabah's maneuver. He had under-estimated his foe, never thinking that ben Hamza could overlap one of the wings of the first contingent, circle to intercept the main body. On the march, Rabah's column would be strung out over a considerable distance after the manner of the natives. Royer had picked out the ridge, where he was now placed, having decided to attack when the enemy straddled the hill, with one half of the forces on the west slope, the remnant still ascending the eastern face. A prompt blow, delivered unexpectedly, would cut the outfit into halves, isolated, incapable of coordination.

After the first shock, ben Hamza's men on the crest would command both sides. The cavalry, left some miles behind, would arrive in a few minutes and catch the scattered men in the bottom of the depressions flanking the ridge. To avoid the discovery he had hidden his men far from the cleared space. It was unlikely that the few scouts which preceded Rabah Zeir would stumble upon them.

This tactic, which would not have deceived a European, had every chance of success. There were two drawbacks: The probable presence of a fool, an excited man among the hundreds—a false move, and Rabah could gather his forces and marshal them. Or the advance guard might break through the thin cordon of covering troops, and attack the camp. This would mean the loss of ben Hamza's baggage. The chance of success had been worth the risk in Hamza's opinion. Royer had put the scheme forward diffidently. To his surprize the men had been eager.

Ben Hamza and the lieutenant crouched on the extreme edge of their line, some feet ahead of the Saras. Suddenly, seemingly materialized out of the night, a dark shape appeared, glided by. Then others. Ben Hamza again gripped Royer's arm.

Rabah Zeir's scouts!

Footmen filed by, then riders. Here and there a gun-barrel glinted feebly. There were no precautions taken. The men spoke loudly, laughed, and were sublimely unconscious of the three hundred pairs of eyes staring at them from the bushes.

Again Royer wondered at the stupidity of the wily chief. But better generals than the old half-breed had been caught by this maneuver. There is nothing new under the sun, and Royer recalled several instances of like night marches, ending in the surprize of the opposing force. Bonaparte, at Rivoli, had managed to get his smaller army

between the Austrian infantry, and the cavalry and artillery. At Jena, the zenith of the super-tactician's career, the same trick had amassed forty thousand infantry in an unexpected emplacement—the Landgrafenberg plateau. A maneuver that had tricked General Alvinzi and the Duke of Brunswick might well be used against a barbarian such as Rabah Zeir!

Many men marched by, at times so close that Royer might have touched them with extended arm. He became more nervous. His trembling increased.

Ben Hamza moved quickly and quietly. Then he fired twice.

From the bushes came the reports of three hundred rifles. Men fell among Rabah's forces; shouts went up, an indescribable confusion. Ben Hamza pulled Royer flat within the bushes, as the Saras coming out of the undergrowth like a battering-ram, struck the band already on the ridge. Bayonets came to clash with the short spears of the enemy. The men facing the Saras happened to be a medley of many tribes, without discipline, insecure. They broke and scattered.

"*Iiiiiiihhh!*"

The war yell of the Saras pierced the night. Others of ben Hamza's men emerged from the bushes, and with a precision Royer had not expected, formed in line on the ridge, firing down on each side.

From the darkness below came a stentorian voice, bellowing orders.

"The chief!" said ben Hamza, and fired in the direction of the sound.

A deep, booming shout rose from the opposite side of the slope, and a new foe appeared—the Bazingirs, who had heard Rabah's call. Though taken by surprize, they advanced in such a way as to win Royer's admiration. Even the solid Saras gave way, and cutting through them, the Bazingirs joined their leader down the slope.

The flashes of the rifles illuminated briefly many corners of the field, but no accurate idea of the progress could be obtained from these short glimpses. The location of the Bazingirs could be ascertained, for their well-directed volleys crashed out as a single explosion.

Royer moved as if to go forward to the Saras. Ben Hamza grasped his arm.

"Stay. Thy life is worth more than many men."

From the valley below, a few hundred yards away, shouts went up—

"Ben Hamza!"

"The cavalry," the Arab suggested impassively. "Indeed one thing follows the other precisely."

"But they do not flee!"

"I have told thee. Rabah's men are not as other men."

"The Saras must go down upon the Bazingirs at once! Unless they are broken, the rest will gather around and our profit will be lost."

"Right. Come with me."

The night echoed with the whine of bullets, fired at random from every angle. But both Royer and ben Hamza were fortunate enough to get to the Saras without harm. Ben Hamza found the leaders, ordered them forward. The Saras found each other through a password, formed in line, charged down the hill, presenting an unbroken line of bayonets, three deep. Royer followed close behind with ben Hamza, who had now caught the fever of combat and rivaled Rabah with his hoarse shouts.

A volley illuminated the hillside, and Royer saw the heads and shoulders of the Saras outlined against the red glow. Then the vision blinked out. The impact of the Saras against the best of Rabah's men was fearful. For a brief minute the attacking force receded, then, gathering momentum, they smashed through the line of slave soldiers.

Though this phase of the combat was invisible to the greater part of ben Hamza's men, the mysterious sense of success was among them, and they screamed their approval. Disheartening to Rabah's warriors, came the shouts from the riders below—

"Rabah flees!"

Yes, for the first time in many years, Rabah Zeir was abandoning a battle-field, the loser. Following him, the best part of his troops rushed away, leaving the isolated spearmen, and a few riflemen who had composed the rear guard. These men fought on bravely, but gathered as they were in the open, fired on from above and two sides, attacked by the cavalry from the plain below, their fire gradually dwindled to a few scattered shots, then ceased altogether. Cries for mercy rang out.

Ben Hamza, standing once more on the very peak of the wide ridge, shouted into the fiery dark below—

"No mercy!"

Royer arrived, returning from the brief pursuit of the main body, with the Saras. The Arab ordered them to go down and help massacre the sheeplike herd.

"They have been abandoned by Rabah," Royer protested. "They are thine for the offer."

"True."

Ben Hamza called a halt to the butchery, and stipulated his terms.

He then turned to Royer.

"It's over," he said coolly. "Now thou canst make a light and tell the hour."

"Two hours before sunrise. See it is already light in the east."

"Has the advance guard attacked our men?" ben Hamza asked presently.

"I don't know. We must return."

"Wait, I will know."

He departed, then came back with a tom-tom, a huge drum borne by two Saras.

"I thought I'd find one among the spearmen," he explained.

It was lighter now. Forms could be distinguished. Royer saw ben Hamza dispose the tom-tom on a flat spread of ground. Then, the Arab placed his ear against the upper skin surface, putting his finger in the other ear.

"No. There is but little firing, and it is receding southeast. They have been informed of the surprize and are on their way to join Rabah."

Royer stared in amazement.

"How dost thou tell?" he questioned.

"Place your ear against the tom-tom, as thou hast seen me do," said ben Hamza.

Royer obeyed. At first he could distinguish only a confused echoing rumble. Then the sharp detonation of rifles, far off.

"Dost hear the footsteps of many men? They are Rabah's. And the firing is his advance guard."

"But I can not tell one noise from the other, nor where they come from," said Royer.

"Thou hast not been brought up to the drum. I can tell one man's steps from another, for I have used it since childhood."

"Is this the way drum-talk is passed on?"

"Sometimes. There are other ways."

"Which?" Royer questioned curiously.

"Thou dost ask what I do not know," Ben Hamza retorted.

They held their place until dawn, when the prisoners were counted. There were over three hundred, similar in race to ben Hamza's blacks but from different villages. They seemed willing to shift their allegiance, and were armed with the rifles found on the field.

In the engagement, but thirty-seven of ben Hamza's force had fallen, fifty or sixty wounded, more or less seriously. As for the enemy, the first discharge had laid many low. The firing had been at close range, almost point-blank. Counting prisoners and losses Rabah Zeir's army had been diminished fifty per cent. According to a captive, who was questioned, Zeir had been stronger than ben Hamza had believed, contingents of spearmen having been marched from Bornu to join him.

Even depleted by the disastrous night combat, Rabah, joined with his advance guard, boasted over twelve hundred men. Ben Hamza, gaining three hundred, still had less than a thousand. Royer was perturbed.

Ben Hamza strode about with an alarming self-confidence.

Royer laughed shortly as he became conscious of the strange situation. But three months ago he was a lieutenant in Fort Canrobert. And now chief of staff of a raiding band!

CHAPTER VI

FORT CANROBERT, a man-made excresence of tall mud walls crested by simili-medieval battlements, stands two hundred miles from the Niger loop, and is the high-water mark of the French penetration.

At the hour of siesta, the shadows are gathered close beneath the walls, a few *Tirailleurs* sleeping noisily, lie asprawl on the hot sand of the cast esplanade.

Commandant Camard vainly sought comfort in his steamer-chair. But sleep eluded him. From his position on the veranda, he could see through the opened eastern gate, the immense horizon. Perhaps, he was reliving his own adventures, desert conflicts with the veiled Tuareg in the southern Sahara. Or, before his eyes, Timbuctu may have risen, Timbuctu the mysterious, a spread of low mud houses, surmounted by squat mosques.

He was vaguely aware of a challenge to the rear. Perhaps a native with supplies. He did not turn. Nothing ever happened

at the Fort. Suddenly, straggling across the yards, horsemen appeared: Spahis. In the lead, was a white man. Camard sat up. No, he was not the victim of a mirage. The crunching of horses' hoofs on the sand could be heard. Newcomers. Some one to speak with!

He got up and descended the steps, leading to the level ground, and reached the party as the horses were being hitched outside the stables in the northern corner. There were fifteen men, including the white officer.

"Commandant Camard?" the newcomer asked, as he dismounted.

"Yes," said Camard, offering his hand. "And——"

"I am Lieutenant Colonel Bornier—Naval Infantry——"

"You're here early. I didn't expect you for some weeks," Camard replied. "But come in and have an appetizer."

With a few brief words to his men, Bornier turned away and followed the commandant to the bungalow, where bottles were brought out. He was a jovial, elongated man, his hatchet-face split by a humorous grin. His white-drill clothing bore no insignia of rank. He seemed more like a casual traveler than a military man.

"I decided to come ahead of my men," he volunteered. "The interminable waits around the towns unnerve one more than work itself. Two hundred men will be here within two months, under the command of a captain. I dodged the red tape. As soon as I got my assignment, I came along to get acquainted with the country."

"Not a bad idea," Camard agreed. "I speak for myself, because I'm glad to have you with me."

Bornier bowed his thanks.

"I'm just back from leave," he resumed. "I was in Dahomey until six months ago. Say—" he paused thoughtfully. "I've heard weird tales of the chaps ahead of me. Pets of the Ministry, it seems. One thing is surprizing. Usually those fellows never got into the interior. They gather the plums after some one else has shaken the tree. Let's see—there's Vauclin and another fellow—birds of a feather, no doubt——"

"Different as day from night, but they seem to understand each other. There's a third man with them, Lieutenant Royer, a rather dependable fellow he seems. He went from here, sort of executive officer, while the other two do the 'discovering' and get the credit."

"I'll try and catch them before they get to Bagirmi. I intend to burn up the distance when my men get here."

But far away lands are always the more interesting. The conversation turned to Tonkin and Annam. The two officers evoked memories of scented jungles, tiger hunts, brushes with Black Flags. The forthcoming trip of the lieutenant-colonel sank into background.

Bornier was a merry fellow, fond of a joke and of the bottle. He possessed a whimsical outlook on things. Camard, charmed by his ease of manner, forgot his worries, laughed in his turn, until the orderly, taking advantage of the lull in Bornier's narration, bent close to his ear—

"Man there—says want speak with you."

"Pardon me, colonel, I'll see what the fellow wants," Camard said. "Probably some palaver over a *Tirailleur's* behavior in the village. I have my petty problems."

"Quite right, Camard," Bornier returned gaily. "Don't let me interfere with family affairs."

The fellow came in.

Dark-brown of skin, lean, hard, with great independence of bearing he differed from the negroes about the Fort, who, protected by the French, had lost their individuality and fierceness of aspect.

He held up his hand in greeting.

"*Salaam*," he began in Arabic. "The blessing of Allah upon thee, *Sidi*."

"And on thee, also," Camard replied in the same language. "You understand?" he asked of Bornier.

"I can follow a conversation—sometimes."

"Who art thou and what is thy wish?" Camard asked.

"My name is Amoud. I am a Tukuleur, a merchant by trade."

"I understand. Proceed."

"Though my mother was a Peulhs, my father was a Senegalese. I was born in Kayes, on the river. I know Frenchmen. That is why I have come to speak with thee."

Camard endured this preliminary, allowed the man to tell his story in his own way.

"I have, or to speak truth, I had, a trading-place at the town of Kanda, many

days journey from here. Hast thou heard of the place?"

"I have. It is near to Sokoto."

"Right. This is my story, commandant. I had left Kanda a prosperous, happy place, when leaving for Douro in the Kano, where I also trade. Fourteen days ago I approached the town on my return, and looked in vain for the houses. They were gone, commandant, burned to ashes! And the people—many were dead, more hurt. Other things, too, which thou canst picture. I was told that thy people, the French, had done the harm. The chief had met them peacefully, agreed to supply them with food for had I not told him the French were just? But the black soldiers looted the town."

Camard spoke to Bornier in swift French—

"As he tells it, our men were to blame."

"Tell him the matter will be investigated. That is the usual phrase when we can't do anything."

"I heard," the Tukuleur smiled easily and signified his understanding. "But there is more. One of the officers killed a porter, bound his eyes so that he could not see, and blew his head off with a cartridge."

"Yes?" asked Camard, unemotional as ever.

"Then the white men separated. One, with only six men, left for the east, while the other two, with the rest of the soldiers, turned south. And from Kanda on, so the drums speak, these men have killed and burned along their trail."

Camard whitened perceptibly. Bornier leaned forward.

"I thought thou wouldst want to know. As for me, my store was burned, and I lost many douros. What is to be done about it?"

Camard promised to take the matter up later, and escorted the native to the door. Then he returned to Bornier and gave a little shrug of helplessness.

"That's what civilization does for them!" laughed the colonel. "If Amoud had never lived near Frenchmen, he would have accepted his loss. Now, he presents a bill!"

"His money loss is his chief concern."

"And what are you going to do about his demand for compensation?"

"Send it ahead. Let some one else worry about it."

"Prankish fellow, our Captain Vauclin!"

Camard rubbed his chin in puzzlement:

"Why have they turned south? Bornu is British territory. And if they cut up like that, there!"

Bornier rose.

"By Jove, that's right—" he brought his fist down on the table. "I'll join them and take command. My captain can take the expedition across when it comes."

"They're a month ahead of you."

"I'll take four men, and burn up the distance. The smaller the party the greater speed. They don't seemed to have progressed any too swiftly. I can get up to them in three weeks."

Camard hesitated.

"Rather irregular, isn't it?" he asked.

"But necessary. Don't forget they are in British territory. There are times when an officer must make his own decision." He winked. "Besides, I never cared to vegetate."

"When will you start?"

"In the morning."

Whistling gayly, Bornier trotted down the steps, crossed the esplanade with long, elastic strides, buoyant, full of life. Camard saw him speak to his men, no doubt making arrangement for the departure.

As the commandant stared at the straight back of the lieutenant-colonel, he experienced a very distinct impression. A miasma of defeat seemed to hang about Bornier. Camard half-started to call him back, and plead with him to reconsider his hasty decision. But Bornier was his superior in rank, and such advice might not be taken in good part. So, Camard did not give voice to the intangible thoughts that begged for utterance.

Within a few hours, it was too late.

Bornier had gone.

CHAPTER VII

BEN HAMZA, clad in loose trousers his torso bared, shaven head resting on a scarlet cushion, looked pensively through the opening of the tent. In his deep, black eyes, lighted up by the sun with a red reflection, could be seen the swarming men outside.

"We've been here four days," Lieutenant Royer began. "Rabah may gather his men, breathe confidence into them, and catch you in the open."

Ben Hamza puffed leisurely at his cigaret, blew the smoke out through his nostrils with superb nonchalance.

"Bah—I have faith."

"Faith is not always sufficient," Royer said impatiently. "Sometimes one must act."

"And what wouldst thou do?"

"I'd have sent riders out to harass him, as I suggested after the combat."

"Why hurry? The sun shines today. It will so shine tomorrow. Man should do so much, then rest."

"Rabah Zeir will think thou dost fear him. When one wishes to bend an iron rod, one heats the rod to a certain point, then apply the effort. The last fight but softened Rabah without breaking him."

"Thou art overeager."

"Every day, he gathers strength."

"Allah knows best. I trust in him alone."

Royer was for the moment struck dumb by the immensity of the assertion.

"And this delay is put to use," ben Hamza went on. "Thy men have taught the Saras many things already."

Ben Hamza got up indolently, went to a coffer, and took from it the map Royer had drawn.

"But perhaps thou art right." He pored over the map. "Put in the other side of the lake," he said abruptly. "And the Shari, which flows this way—" he indicated with a scratch of his thumb nail, the flow of the river.

Royer sketched in the desired details.

Ben Hamza surveyed the drawing critically, rubbed his nose in disapproval.

"Not right," he remarked. "This distance—" he again indicated—"is greater in proportion to the rest."

This had been ben Hamza's manner since the victory, a superiority that extended even to a criticism of the young man's map-making. The lieutenant understood. While willing to use a *Roumi*, ben Hamza wished to get help at the least possible loss of prestige. He now referred to the night march as his own idea—worked out and amplified by the Frenchman, true enough, but still a child of his own brain. Royer was treated more or less as a prisoner of war, and the general attitude was one of tolerance.

He quietly tore the map to shreds.

Ben Hamza mumbled apologies, gathered the pieces together, and gave Royer no rest until he had made a duplicate.

"Do not be angry," he explained. "I was but talking."

"Thou shouldst act instead. Where is Rabah Zeir."

"I do not know exactly."

"The scouts?"

"Abandoned the trail when Rabah went too far south. I hear drum-talk of him, that's all."

"Why would he not send out false news on the drums, of his being far away, and yet hover close to come upon thee unawares?"

Ben Hamza signified his understanding.

"Be at peace, Frenchman, today I shall set out to find him."

"I suggest this camp be moved many miles northeast, leaving small outposts to fall back and warn us should he approach. We should wait for the coming of the French who will help thee against Rabah Zeir."

"I want nought to do with the *Roumis*."

"Thou art not strong enough to fight Rabah Zeir alone for long. The other night was lucky."

"If Allah favored me once, why not again? Listen, Frenchman, I shall go south. In Bagirmi and Dagana, I have many friends who will help me. Should I reach there before Rabah Zeir himself, I would succeed him."

"At the first defeat, the men would desert to Rabah Zeir."

"I shall suffer no defeats."

"Heaven alone knows!" said Royer. "My advice is to go north, instead of trying to gain Bagirimi."

Ben Hamza flexed his arms, yawned.

"Understand, Frenchman, my tents and many villages of mine are there."

"But thou wouldst lose thy life as well as thy belongings."

A negro servant thrust his head within the tent.

"Si Lahal is coming," he said.

Si Lahal entered immediately. He nodded gravely to Royer, who bowed in return, then settled himself on a cushion.

"Ben Hamza, we wish to know what is to be done," he began.

So Royer was not the only one to become impatient. The Arabs, too, were wondering when ben Hamza would act.

The leader told of his plan for an immediate departure for his own lands, claiming, that, as luck had served him once, he need have no fear.

"Fortune is for the bold, not the craven," he stated pompously.

Royer exposed his reasons against the move toward Bagirmi.

"The stranger speaks the truth, ben Hamza." Si Lahal said.

Ben Hamza then flew into one of his customary rages, paced the floor of the tent, tugged at the hangings, cried out that all men were against him, and that no one believed in his words.

"Did I not advise the move the other night?" he demanded in conclusion.

"Thou speakest as a child," Si Lahal declared. "Ingratitude is a black sin. Listen to an old man."

"Thou didst tell me that Rabah would defeat me at the first encounter," protested ben Hamza. "Was that wisdom of an old man? And thou art asking me to listen to the words of a stranger, and he boasts no more years then I."

"If he were to say that he knew the Sudan better than thee, thou wouldst laugh. And yet, thou dost seem to know more of battle than he!"

Ben Hamza donned gandoura and burnous, and violently left the tent. Si Lahal saluted Royer gravely, and followed him out. The lieutenant was left alone.

Naturally, Royer's first interest was for the French. Ben Hamza, as an auxiliary would prove useful when the mission which was to follow Vauclin's arrived on the spot, or the outfit from Algeria. If ben Hamza could be thus used, Royer would have done a meritorious thing. But if it proved that he had trained an adversary, he would find himself in a precarious position toward the army authorities.

There was also a possibility that Vauclin and Lamuse might weaken before their stupendous task, and decide to follow out their orders. If they pulled together, Royer might be proved a deserter. Goualy's testimony would not hold against that of two white officers, particularly if Royer were found with the Arabs.

He was busy with these unpleasant thoughts when ben Hamza again entered.

The Arab was smiling now, and made no mention of the previous scene. He looked Royer up and down, from tan riding-boots, to the pith helmet dangling in his fingers.

"I'll give thee other clothing," he said. "That dress would make thee a target for many bullets if we fought in the daylight."

Royer tapped his helmet.

"But I need this," he said.

Ben Hamza laughed, and found one of his own silken turbans which he adjusted on Royer, then stepped back and contemplated his handiwork.

"There is enough cloth to protect thy head, and by my father's mother I swear thou dost look more like an Arab than I!"

Ben Hamza called in the negro, sent him to the caravan for one of the large mirrors captured among trade articles. Royer found a childish pleasure in donning the clothes. And when he caught a glimpse of himself, he smiled. His sunburned face was dark enough for an Arab, and should he allow his beard to grow in Moslem fashion he would indeed appear as Ben Hamza's brother.

What were ben Hamza's reasons for the change? The danger of exposure to rifle-fire was not convincing. But ben Hamza elucidated:

"As long as thou wert in French dress the others would distrust thee. Now I shall tell them that thou dost intend to stay with us, forgetting thine own people."

Instead of a straight sword, ben Hamza buckled upon him a scimiter, a Fez blade, in an ornate, red-leather sheath.

"Six months more and thou wilt speak Arabic as I do," he said. "Then the change will be complete."

Ben Hamza strode out, followed by Royer, who attracted much favorable comment. Goualy alone seemed sulky. And yet he had returned to the primitive and now wore the loin-cloth and feather headgear of the Saras.

At the council which followed, Royer was greeted by jokes and exclamations of approval. He had not thought the grave chiefs capable of levity. And his costume, as ben Hamza had said, seemed to inspire confidence. Seeing that ben Hamza had decided definitely on the move south, the lieutenant made no more protests. His proposal was accepted unanimously. Si Lahal was not in evidence.

Word was spread in the camp. Tents were dropped, loaded on camels. An immense cloud of dust formed a yellow-white canopy over the encampment. Camels squealed. Their drivers cursed. Royer thought of a circus he had seen when a boy. Such is man: In the midst of important matters intrude minute memories, irrelevant but impressive.

Before noon, the little army was on the

march, covering two miles of ground on a front fifty yards wide, a loose, disjointed aggregation of men and animals. On the flanks rode riders, rifles across the saddle. Ben Hamza consented to send ahead a detachment of scouts, under Bu Kach, who, despite his fat, was keen and fearless.

"Thou dost understand," ben Hamza remarked, leaning toward Royer. "I am the chief. Just so much canst thou order. When the final word is said, it is mine."

ON THE tenth day after the departure Rabah Zeir had materialized out of the mist, a barrier of threatening rifles and spears. He had bided his time and waited until ben Hamza and his troops were far into Bornu.

The forenoon was occupied by desultory fighting. Ben Hamza was uncertain, irresolute, while Rabah felt his ground with his usual masterly touch. The Bazingirs who might be called Rabah's shock troops, had lived up to their reputation. Executing brilliant advances under fire, they had driven back the extreme tips of ben Hamza's army against the hills.

CHAPTER VIII

BEN HAMZA'S face darkened. On the slope of the hill before him, behind the opposing lines, he saw the gathering of the Bazingirs. The next attack would be pushed through. The others had been but maneuvers to ascertain his strength.

"This is the first assault that will be serious," Royer said. "Rabah Zeir means to break thy line, push through, and crush us between two forces."

"Thy wisdom is indeed astounding!" ben Hamza replied in irritation.

Royer again lifted his glasses, saw other detachments arriving, massing in solid phalanxes. Yes, the decisive blow was about to be struck. The old chief had wisely waited for the expedition to emerge through the defile between two hills—hills which were difficult of ascent, impossible for cavalry or laden camels.

Should ben Hamza attempt to skirt the hills on either side, he would expose his flank to attack. His wings would be crushed before the main body could escape. An abler leader might have attempted this move with a chance for success. But ben Hamza dare not. The quick rush, results, then victory or flight—such was his guerilla method.

In addition to the uncertainty of his position he had also to cope with the three hundred spearmen captured after the night ambuscade. They had suddenly proven unruly at the sight of Rabah's green standards, had had to be "framed" by some of the more loyal troops.

Royer lowered his glasses with a nervous gesture.

"What is to be done?" Ben Hamza asked.

"Much now. Nothing in fifteen minutes. Tell me, venerable beard—" he turned to Si Lahal, who with several other riders stood near at hand, as aides-de-camp—"has ben Hamza any troops not engaged?"

"Every one is there," Si Lahal indicated the long line, over-hung by streamers of light smoke from the discharges. "Behind are only camel-guards, camp-followers, a riff-raff not to be used in battle."

"When the Bazingirs attack, forces will have to be drawn to meet them."

"Yes."

"What can be done?" repeated ben Hamza. "Canst not thou see! There are the Saras, over there, the Sokotos," he located the various elements composing his line. "I have not lost many men, and if I could but withdraw——"

But he shook his head as he glanced to the rear, at the narrow pass which afforded the only gateway.

"Here they come!" put in Si Lahal.

The first mass of Bazingirs, perhaps a hundred and fifty, were bounding forward. Ben Hamza ran down to the front line, exhorting his men, and the firing increased. The Bazingirs halted, then took cover. Another mass ran down the hill, and joined them, then a third.

"They're getting into position for the final blow," Si Lahal predicted. "They will gather in that depression until they are ready, then attack. I counted over two hundred."

Royer lifted the glasses to his eyes.

"Rabah Zeir took them from his left wing. It is therefore the weaker," he pointed out.

"Our men have held out against twice their number since dawn," ben Hamza put in.

"Because Rabah Zeir has spared his men.

When he decides to start in earnest, everything will be over in a few minutes."

"What is to be done?" ben Hamza demanded savagely.

"If anything is to be done, I must have full charge."

Royer wanted the acknowledgment of his leadership, so that, when the French arrived, he would have a chance to sway the Arabs in their favor, even against ben Hamza's opinion.

Ben Hamza glanced swiftly at Si Lahal, who made no gesture, either of approval or disapproval.

"Agreed," ben Hamza said shortly.

Royer again surveyed the enemy's lines.

"Where are our riders?" he inquired.

"Some of them have dismounted and are fighting on foot."

"Gather them."

An aide rode away to give the order.

"The Saras are on our left wing?" demanded Royer.

"Yes."

"Gather them out of sight, behind the bushes. Order the others to fill the gaps. The strength in that spot will not matter. Rabah's attack will not bear there."

Si Lahal left to accomplish this mission.

Royer handed the glasses to ben Hamza.

"Turn the little wheel in the center until things may be seen clearly. Now, look behind Rabah's line. What do you see?"

"Camels, horses——"

"His baggage-train, eh?"

"Yes."

Royer indicated the opposite end of the line.

"Now, look there—the riders in the white burnous?"

"Rabah's riders. I know the standards."

"Rabah Zeir, do you see him?"

"At the left of the riders. He has men with him to guard him."

Royer knew that ben Hamza could compute the strength of a body of men with great accuracy.

"Are all his horsemen there?"

"Yes."

"Leaving the baggage-train practically ungarded."

"We will attack his baggage-train!"

"Not immediately. We must wait our time."

"When? It will be too late when the Bazingirs come forward!"

"Not necessarily. Would Rabah Zeir sooner allow thee to escape this once than lose his stuff forever?"

"Yes. He has wealth on those camels."

"Now, listen well. When the Saras are gathered, they must line up to hold the Bazingirs in check. This will induce Rabah to send his horsemen forward to flank them, will it not?"

"I would so act were I he."

"He will be in a hurry to smash through. He may even ride himself."

"True again."

"Then we must ride through his left wing, which is thinned down," he indicated the spot. "See, there is but one man every fifteen steps. He has no fear of an attack."

"It will be easy to break through."

"Once through—the baggage-train! No looting—the flame must be set to the piles of baggage. Understand?"

"Yes."

"He will turn his cavalry to save his baggage. The Bazingirs will hesitate, undecided. The Saras must attack then, vigorously. The rest of your men will have ample time to get into the pass between the hills, to gain the open country behind, and flee. The Saras can easily slip away after the work is done, even if they have to take to the hills. And the horsemen can escape as best they may."

"But if Rabah Zeir does not act as thou dost expect?"

"He will—*in cha Allah!*"

The Arab managed a wry smile.

Si Lahal returned.

"The Saras are gathered," he announced.

Ben Hamza was eager to start.

"Stay, who is to lead the retreat?" Royer asked. "For I see thou wilt join me with the riders."

Ben Hamza hesitated.

"Is Bu Kach here?"

"Yes."

"Put him at the head."

Si Lahal nodded.

Ben Hamza flushed, and said—

"No, I do not like him over-much."

Royer leaned closer—

"But I am in command until we are out of this, and I want Bu Kach."

"Agreed," said ben Hamza, and rode away to give the final instruction.

Si Lahal shook his head.

"Thou hast angered him," he said.

Royer glanced at his watch. It was now one in the afternoon.

As if his glance had given the signal for the attack, the Bazingirs emerged from their place of concealment, three hundred yards from the front line of ben Hamza's forces, and swept forward. The first volley from the defenders, who were dispersed in clumps of bushes or lying prone on the ground, took fearful effect. The hundred Saras counted heavily.

Nevertheless, the slave soldiers advanced, shouting, encouraged by the screams of those at their rear. Their bravery seemed panic-proof. Even well-trained European troops might have given way in such a situation. The negroes merely spread out to form less of a target, and moved forward in great bounds. Behind them rose a cloud of spearmen, each protected by a huge leather buckler painted in gaudy colors, and topped by a feather head-dress of astounding proportion.

They reached the line.

From the bushes emerged the Saras, led by Goualy, bayonets forward. For the second time, Royer witnessed the encounter between the giant negroes and the famous Bazingirs. He was aware of the ferocity of the conflict, which divided almost immediately into independent combats, man to man. The spearmen hovered about, ineffectually.

Then from ben Hamza's right came a cloud of spearmen, to support the riflemen and the Saras, engaging their former allies. The fighting was severe, but the line held, the Bazingirs not being willing to give way and fall back, the Saras fighting with a discipline born of their recent training, and a confidence sprung from their previous victory.

Ben Hamza returned.

"The riders are ready. Bu Kach will command."

Royer acknowledged the information briefly, and indicated Rabah Zeir's horsemen, moving down the line to reach a clear field in the center, where the Saras were holding the attack to a standstill.

"They come, as I said."

"Yes. And Rabah himself has moved closer."

"He seems still cautious. Detach fifty riders to go around behind the trees, in evidence, to make him think you are gathering the horsemen there."

Ben Hamza dispatched a mounted man. A few minutes later a swarm of white burnooses galloped across a clear space, and were lost behind protecting foliage. This may have been what Rabah was waiting for. He swept forward in the charge, smashed into the struggling footmen.

"Now!" said Royer, and galloped to the main body of the horsemen, followed by ben Hamza.

They hurled themselves down the line, hidden from the enemy by the trees, until opposite Rabah's left wing, where he bore straight at the opposing body.

He was aware of the shrill whine of bullets. The scattering figures of the warriors before him indicated the crossing of the defensive cordon thrown by Rabah to cover his left. At his side rode ben Hamza. Behind, he could hear the trampling of two hundred horses.

A shout went up from the camel-guards—

"Ben Hamza!"

A few scattered shots. Horses down behind, so Royer sensed. Then the drivers ran, abandoning the camels and baggage. Ben Hamza reined his horse, leaped from the saddle, picked up a brand from the fire and threw it on the nearest heap of merchandise. Others did likewise. Royer watched the field, saw that the fifty horsemen, detached as a blind, had come to the aid of the Saras.

Ben Hamza even set fire to the loads on the camels, which created a hopeless confusion. Flames mounted suddenly from huge piles of booty. The spare horses had broken loose, and were racing madly about, seeking escape from the turmoil. Dogs howled. Women screamed.

Rabah had turned, and was now shouting in vain to make himself heard above the clamor. The Bazingirs were the first to understand his wish and attempted to abandon the field. The other elements of Rabah's army, without direction, held their position.

Rabah rode back toward his baggage with the bulk of his horsemen.

Royer shouted a warning. Ben Hamza's men mounted and rode westward.

"Hurry!" urged ben Hamza. "He's mad with rage!" And he laughed.

The riflemen scattered without firing a shot. Utter demoralization seemed to have spread, like a powder train, to all of Rabah's men.

The Saras were moving forward in the center. A long stream of men poured into

the pass, out of reach, on the far side of the hills. Skirmishing before the enemy, were Bu Kach and his men. There was little danger that the retreat would be impeded.

The fire, in Rabah's camp, had spread into the animal lines, flames which must be fought with sand and earth, as there was no water.

Ben Hamza rode at a tangent to help the rear-guard action. Royer passed through the defile and into the open plain beyond, and joined the main body, which was traveling at a swift pace, bound northward, out of Bornu.

Once in the open country of the lower Manga, ben Hamza's force was safe from surprize. Enemy scouts still clung to the vicinity, accomplished small raids, kept up constant contact with the riders of Bu Kach.

Camp was established, not far from the Murzuk road. Here, the chief, who knew the surrounding country, held strategic advantage.

SINCE his conformance to Arab custom in the matter of dress, and the masterly handling of the retreat, Royer had gained the confidence of the minor chiefs. He was in regular attendance at the councils held three times a week. These councils soon became a battle of words between the partisans of the Frenchman, and the small clique which had gathered around ben Hamza.

Ben Hamza's jealousy had grown, and Royer blamed himself for not having had more tact. His zeal in anticipating the coming of the French had led him to seek a too important position for himself. And he could not blame ben Hamza, especially when minor intrigues became the order of the day. It was common rumor in the tents that Royer would betray the band to the French. Like tales were circulated about ben Hamza's purpose concerning a readjustment with his former leader.

In the meantime, Royer worked, and said little.

In the engagement he had noticed a confusion caused by the disparity in armament of men in the same unit, a modern rifle here, a trade musket there, and the resulting loss in the ammunition supply. He decided also to develop a certain sense of pride among the blacks, by gathering together those of the same village and giving them leaders of their own choice.

He created rewards, not in money but in the form of distinctive insignia. He recalled Napoleon's maxim, that men are governed with toys, as are children, and decorated the Saras with a special badge, to commemorate their conduct during the crucial attack. To each company of riflemen, he assigned a body of spearmen, which were to support and cover the particular unit. He also made it known that when gaps were made in battle among the riflemen, these places were to be filled by spearmen who had shown themselves worthy of reward. A scale of punishments was drawn up, foreseeing every offense against the rules—from a badly kept rifle to the murder of a comrade.

The Saras, sixty in number, were taught to march in step and used in demonstration. Various simple maneuvers, which would come into use on the field, were put forward by Goualy and the three ex-*Tirailleurs* who had emerged from the last conflict.

All this ben Hamza watched with approving eye. He could not do otherwise. He needed Royer, if he were to attempt to hold his ground with Rabah Zeir and it was doubtful now if the camp would brook the deposal of their *Roumi* teacher.

Goualy, who was the head of the Saras—the leaders had been killed—in excess of zeal, caused the first open hostility between Royer and ben Hamza.

In the middle of a council, ben Hamza rose—

"I have heard that the Frenchman's Ouolof has spoken evil of me to the Saras."

"Goualy?" questioned Royer.

"Yes, thy man."

Ben Hamza glanced about the circle.

"Listen, brothers: when I broke away from Rabah Zeir I was your chief. You would not desert me. Now, because a stranger has had success, you turn away from me, and look to him for orders. And his man speaks against me!"

"I have had no hand in this," Royer assured him. "I think thee chief, and hereby address thee as such."

"Words, fine words!" retorted ben Hamza. "Bring in the Saras," he ordered the servant at the door.

Two Saras came in, stood embarrassed in the center of the circle.

"You speak Arabic?" asked ben Hamza.

"Yes, master."

"Tell us what Goualy has told you."

One of the blacks acted as spokesman, asking for the other's confirmation with an inquiring look, at intervals.

"He has told us that we should not have won without his master. That we were to serve him and no other. That when the other *Roumis* came, we would be given clothing, and pay, and be made into soldiers like himself."

"That was what he said," approved the other.

"And what else?" urged ben Hamza.

"That our chief, ben Hamza, would be slain by the stranger, should he deny his leadership. That he, Goualy, would then command all the blacks."

Ben Hamza waved the two away, and they left.

"Well, Frenchman, what hast thou to answer?"

"That I have never spoken thus to Goualy," Royer replied calmly enough. "Should I not be believed, call Goualy. He will say that he spoke of his own accord."

"Of course, he will shield thee."

"He is a Moslem," put in Si Lahal. "If he will give his word——"

Goualy was brought in.

"Thou art a Moslem?" demanded Si Lahal.

"Yes, venerable man."

"Dost swear to speak the truth?"

"Yes, upon my head."

"This is what we have heard," said Si Lahal, and he narrated what the Saras had told.

Goualy's expression changed. He showed emotion but he answered evenly:

"I have so told. They speak the truth."

The other Arabs drew away and Royer was left standing alone.

"Who ordered thee to speak?" Si Lahal asked.

"No one."

"Did not thy master?"

"No."

"Did he ever speak these words to thee?"

"No."

"Why didst thou speak then?"

"I am chief in my village. But I serve my master here, and I want that all others shall serve him."

The negro's assurance held something of the comical.

"And then, thou sayest things without permission?"

"My master does not take what rightly belongs to him. I would have given it to him."

"The man is mad," said Si Lahal. "This is no fault of thine, Frenchman."

Royer shrugged.

"Goualy," he said, "Thou hast caused me much ill-favor through ill-advised speech. Henceforth, do nothing without orders."

"He has threatened me, he must be punished!" Ben Hamza put in.

"That is but just," agreed Goualy.

"I demand his head," said ben Hamza. "He is of a race of slaves, and spoke of killing me."

"That is just," again spoke Goualy.

Royer was aware that his corporal was in serious danger, and said:

"Goualy, from now on thou art not a chief, but a warrior among others. Ben Hamza will grant thee thy life upon my plea. Wilt thou, ben Hamza?"

"Yes," agreed ben Hamza cautiously. "If he hold no authority."

Goualy left.

Ben Hamza, not pacified, demanded of Royer that he tell his purpose, saying that there was never smoke without fire, never a rumor without foundation.

"In one part the tales are true," answered Royer frankly. "I will do all I can to make your peace with the French when they come, and leave you your Sultanate, and moreover help you against your enemies. Rabah Zeir is their foe as well as yours."

"And should we fight them?"

"I will leave you. But never will I fire upon you, for you are as my brothers."

Ben Hamza urged for a clearer understanding. Royer did his best to explain, but the mention of any control had made the Arabs uneasy, and his explanations were drowned under a shower of protests.

The situation was thus, when Bu Kach entered, and said that he held two prisoners, captured on the outskirts of the camp.

Curiosity ran high, which put an end to the immediate discussion.

"Bring them in," said Si Lahal.

Two men were thrust within.

One was a thin, diminutive fellow, with a heavy beard, clad in rags, his feet showing through the European boots. The other was broad-shouldered, blond. Royer could scarcely believe his eyes.

Vauclin and Lamuse!

Their attitude was cringing, and they

whined a plea in broken Arabic. Lamuse had lost his stolidity and was comically loquacious in his disjointed lament.

"They are French," said Si Lahal, and turned to Royer. "Wilt thou talk to them?"

"What do you wish, where do you come from?" Royer asked in his own tongue.

The two turned startled, and regarded him.

"It can't be, Royer—" Vauclin managed, after some time had elapsed.

"It is!" smiled the lieutenant.

Lamuse looked at him from beneath lowered brows, stared in amazement at the Arab costume, then slumped forward in relief.

"Now we're all right," he breathed. "Now we're all right!"

CHAPTER IX

"YOU'D better let me have the straight of the story," said Royer.

He had brought his former companions to his tent, having been granted that right from Ben Hamza and the council. Royer's vindication with regard to the Goualy affair had evidently caused the Arabs to feel that some proof of trust was rightly due him, although there were those who did not regard with pleasure the reunion of the three Frenchmen.

In his explanation before ben Hamza, Vauclin had told a disjointed story. They had become lost and wandered on foot over many miles. Royer was keen to hear the details concerning the failure of the "greatest adventure of the century."

Vauclin, refreshed, shaved, and clad in clean clothing had regained some of his former assurance. As for Lamuse, he could not take his eyes off Royer, so unexpectedly found leading a partisan band west of the Chad.

"After we left you—" Vauclin began—"or rather after you left us, we went into Kano. Everything was going well at first. But the —— *Tirailleurs* knowing, through your departure, and Goualy's talk, that we were not backed by the government, became unruly. After a week, Lamuse had to wallop his way to authority. The porters deserted, five or six a night. After a while we had to abandon the greater part of our baggage. We placed sentries around the porters. There was some shooting, one or two troopers knifed in the dark. We had been away ten days when the first man talked back to Lamuse."

Lamuse nodded.

"Lamuse struck him, but he couldn't do anything against so many. The fact that we were white didn't seem to impress them. They knew whatever they did to us could never be laid against them. The sight of our one hundred and fifty men shuffling along was a joke. The laziest of the troopers requisitioned porters to carry their rifles. In fact it had been their attitude toward the porters that had caused the latter to desert. Lamuse and I held a consultation, and decided that a fight of any kind would make them look up to us. We attacked a village and met with little resistance. But this sort of thing took too many cartridges, and we decided not to repeat. In that village we found tusks, produce, everything we had come out after. Then a difficulty presented itself. There was the stuff, but we had no one to carry it.

"Lamuse led a party into the bush and rounded up forty or fifty natives. We loaded the ivory on them. Next morning, thirty miles away from nowhere, they deserted, in spite of the guards. The heaps of tusks were by the side of the trail, as lost to us as if they'd been thrown into the sea. Our own porters, what was left of them, had all they could carry."

"Then the blacks suddenly decided that they were full partners, insisted on having voice concerning the direction we were to take. I had never thought of so many complications. Those negroes got completely out of hand, fought among themselves, left by groups of ten or twelve on private raids. Many times they returned, minus several of their number."

Royer could understand this, since Goualy's stupid outbreak. Given authority, the primitive man is bound to abuse the privilege.

"We were attacked one morning by a mob of spearmen, and had to fight our way through. In the excitement we lost practically all our porters, and the supplies they carried. At the next village, instead of finding the place empty save for a few stragglers, we found the warriors lined up. The news of our arrival had preceded us, also the information that we could not do much. We were, at the time, living off the country. I dare not risk a conflict. So we swung wide

of the village, raided a few of the outlying groups of huts, and went on——"

"But if the warriors were lined up, how did they let you escape?"

"Our—scouts came back and reported that," Lamuse put in quickly.

"I see," Royer agreed.

"Lamuse, by this time, had lost his horse," Vauclin went on. "Mine gave out shortly after. ——, Royer, that eternal walking under the sun! Even after I went to sleep at night, I was walking, walking. There were at this time only forty-five *Tirailleurs* left. The rest had either been cut off and massacred on the smaller raids, or had deserted, followed by porters. You remember I had the idea to settle down in one of the villages, as headquarters, radiate from there over the surrounding country?"

Vauclin paused, unable for the moment to go on. He wiped his perspiring face. Lamuse, reminiscent, shook his head. It was evident they had suffered much. Royer felt a vague pity for them.

"We stopped in a little place, surrounded by mud walls," Vauclin went on. "It seemed well prepared for defense. We got in without difficulty, the place being empty. The warriors had evidently gone to another village to find safety in numbers. Once there, what could we do? Dwindled to forty, we were too weak to divide, leave a guard within the place and issue forth for raids. And yet, we could not stay on indefinitely."

"But at another village, you found the natives showing fight," Royer put in. "And yet this place was deserted!"

Vauclin flushed.

"I'm not telling you that I understand it. I'm telling things as they happened. The logical is not to be expected from the negroes around here."

"Perhaps not," Royer assented. "But go on."

"One week went by, then another. We had no more food, we had to move. We started out, all in a bunch, and roamed about not daring to go near the villages. Here and there we managed to clean out a few isolated huts. We dared not retrace our steps because the country was up, behind us. By this time we both would have been willing to go back to the Fort and take our medicine."

"Yes," approved Lamuse.

"From then on, it scarcely seems real, a nightmare. If I wasn't here, talking to you, I wouldn't believe myself. We walked and walked. Grass plains, dunes, forests, then more grass, more forests, more dunes. And always in fear——"

"It's a wonder you didn't get attacked and cleaned out," suggested Royer.

"Yes," agreed Vauclin, "it is."

"And when did you break away from the last of your men?"

"When they began to threaten us. They were frightened, and naturally enough, they blamed us. They didn't realize that we suffered more than they did, being Europeans. We had to eat their food, our cook had gone long before that. To make it short, we got up one night, and walked off into the bushes, traveled as far as we could before daylight, then hid all day in a tree. They looked for us, fired shots to attract our attention, for in spite of everything, they felt safer with white men, than alone. But I was afraid they'd kill us—in time——"

Vauclin's voice trailed off, either in weariness or uncertainty.

"They would have, before long," agreed Lamuse.

"Then we walked, and walked, alone, just the two of us. We were lost, our maps were gone. We didn't even have a compass. This morning that fat Arab rode down on us, and brought us in here."

Vauclin stopped and drew a deep breath.

"And how did you get here?" he asked quickly.

"Same way. Bu Kach found me with the six *Tirailleurs*. I happened to come at the opportune moment."

Royer briefly narrated what had happened since he had joined the band.

Vauclin brought one fist down against the palm of his hand:

"Great! And your idea is to get ben Hamza to accept French protectorate over his lands?"

"Naturally."

Vauclin glanced at Lamuse, smiled and said:

"We may be able to help out. Listen, Royer, there's a way of turning this to the credit of all of us."

"And why should I do that?"

"We're down and out, old man. We've given up our scheme for all time. It wouldn't be much to testify for us."

"And the killing of the porter, the burning

of Kanda. Who'll take the responsibility for that?"

"Who's going to know? Royer, you're alone here with a lot of savages. I say we ought to hold together, we three white men. Suppose we say that we arrived together, that we swung the thing over, after being abandoned by our men."

"The *Tirailleurs* would not have abandoned us. No, Vauclin, I'm afraid in this case, truth will out."

"And what do you intend to do with us?"

"Keep you until the coming of the French."

"No!" exclaimed Lamuse.

Vauclin laid a quieting hand on his arm. But before he could speak, a shot came from one end of the camp, then the swift pattering of many horses, shouts. Royer ran to the opening of the tent, and looked out.

Men were running, here and there. Tents were being lowered. Royer shouted a question at a passing rider of his acquaintance.

"News!" the fellow called back. "Rabah Zeir has gone east, this morning. The council is being gathered!"

Royer reentered the tent.

"I must go," he informed the others. "You may wait for me here."

"What's up?"

"Rabah Zeir is on the move, retreating toward the upper end of Lake Chad. The chiefs will meet."

"Ah—and you will meet with them!" Vauclin put in.

"I want you two to stay in here out of the way. One can never tell how popular feeling will swing."

"All right," agreed Vauclin, meekly enough.

Indeed, Royer knew they would not dare leave the camp, where they had found comparative safety.

The chiefs were gathered in the open, some distance away from the tent, with a crowd listening. Evidently the tidings brought in by the scouts had created great excitement.

Ben Hamza rose at his approach and beckoned with his hand—

"Hasten Frenchman!"

Royer found a space next to Si Lahal. At first he could not make out the point under discussion.

"What has been said?" he asked of the old man.

"Rabah Zeir has gathered his forces and gone eastward, as thou knowest by camp talk. But we now know why. The French are coming, many of them, from the west. Rabah will not allow himself to be caught between the *Roumis* and ben Hamza. He is making for his own territory. Listen, for ben Hamza speaks!"

BEN HAMZA'S deep voice rose above the tumult.

"Brothers, less than a month ago, we attempted to reach Dagana. We were forced to retrace our steps. But our villages, and the families of many of us, are still there. Rabah Zeir has gone eastward, for, according to one here present Bornu is not permitted to them."

Royer remembered having informed ben Hamza that the Colonial conference had allotted Bornu to Great Britain, and once more realized that a still tongue is sometimes preferable to a too hasty confidence.

"If we depart through Bornu, not only will the French not dare pursue us, but we will reach Dagana and Bagirmi before Zeir. There are those there who will gladly join us, for Rabah has many enemies, and Fader el Aziz still more. I will tell my tale of his injustice to me. The power will be in our hands for Rabah will be caught between the French and ourselves and will ask for terms."

"Yes, he speaks the truth!" came the note of approval.

"And then, united, we can drive the French out."

Another chief got up. Royer knew him by sight, and had always sensed in him a certain resolution, and a jealousy of ben Hamza. His lean face thrust forward on a thin neck, he spoke forcibly.

"Is it thy wish to drive the French out?' he challenged.

"Yes," said ben Hamza.

"Then, tell me, why not join Rabah Zeir now? He is of our race, a true Moslem. He has shown his ability in battle. With us he could accomplish tomorrow or today, what we will not be able to do a month hence. Why this loss of time?

"We are his enemies," said ben Hamza.

"We have taken up thy quarrel over his son, and much evil has befallen us since!"

"We have held Rabah in check."

"Say what you will, each time we fled from him. And he who flees is defeated."

"And what wouldst thou do?"

"I would go to Rabah Zeir and say: 'O Chief, we have foolishly quarreled. But now, the *Roumis* are come, we need union.' "

He paused, glanced about, saw that his words had not been without effect, and went on, loudly:

"Should we return to our families, to the villages you spoke of, what will be said of us who allowed Moslems to be crushed by Christians? Will the chiefs join you then?"

This created a sensation.

Royer realized that left to himself Rabah Zeir would still prove a redoubtable adversary for the approaching column. And if ben Hamza joined him, the chances would be doubled that the expedition would fail utterly.

Time was precious. Others beside France were angling for Bagirmi. Against his more immediate foes Rabah might turn to other Europeans. Six years before the old chief had been in relation with the Royal Niger Company, and had attempted to reach an understanding. The negotiations had fallen through. But there was another adversary now to fear, not as scrupulous as the British had been concerning the supply of arms. It was to be feared that the nation who had holdings neither in Northern Africa nor in the South, would run big chances, would spare no effort to enlarge its West African possessions.

He who obtained the Bagirmi region was on the threshold of the Wadai. If Germany took the Wadai, the French possessions were separated, the Congo Colony would not be linked to the High Senegal and Niger, the system of railroads that would ultimately connect the African possessions would not be under French control.

At this seemingly unimportant council, perhaps the fate of a continent was being decided. He could not listen in apathetic silence. Though there was grave risk in the interference, he found himself on his feet:

"Listen. I would speak!"

In the hush that followed he realized that his popularity had dwindled with the threat of the coming of the French. Yes, even though he wore Arab dress, he was a *Roumi*. Some one in the crowd jeered audibly.

"Hear him!" Si Lahal shouted, supported by a small number.

"Keep still!" another demanded.

"Ben Hamza, wilt thou listen?" he challenged.

Ben Hamza smiled. With the turning of the tide he seemed to have lost his jealousy and fear of the white officer.

"Speak," he said, with a touch of condescension.

"Rabah Zeir is your enemy. Though he might wish to use you when the French are here, he will turn against you, should they depart. You are playing with your lives if you join him."

"It is right," said ben Hamza, for this coincided with his own wish.

"In the past have I proved of ill-advice?" Royer questioned. "Who should talk of the French but I, who know them, and who know you also. I say, go to the commander of the French peacefully, offer help and you will be received well."

"We want no foreign masters!"

"Whether you wish it or not, you will have foreign masters. It is inevitable. But the French will allow you to retain your customs, your faith, and your Sultans. Tell me, do other nations do thus?"

"All *Roumis* are thieves," a voice went up. "There is no choice between them."

"And there are not many Frenchmen," said another. "If so, why do they use black soldiers?"

"Are there men here who have been north, to Algeria, to Tunis?" Royer asked.

Assent came from several quarters.

"Tell the man who says it is night because his eyes are shut—tell him how many Frenchmen there are!"

"There are many more than one can count," came the agreement.

"Speak also of the warriors, of the cannon, and also of the Arabs in Algeria. Are they slaves or free men?"

Ben Hamza took up the question:

"I, too, have been to Algeria and Tunis. Although the Arabs have kept their Sheiks and Caids, they are but slaves to the French."

"To obey the law is not to be a slave," Royer retorted.

"A master is a master whether he be kind or not. And we of Dagana will have no master!" ben Hamza shouted.

This drew cheers of approval.

"What right has the Frenchman to speak?" challenged the persistent objector.

"He speaks well," said Si Lahal. "And he has been with us in battle."

"Si Lahal's blood is cold! He sees no further than the end of his nose!"

"Since when have old men been insulted in council?" Si Lahal demanded heatedly.

"It should be so, when men on the edge of the grave tell others how to live," replied the other.

"Peace!" interrupted a voice. "Respect to Si Lahal who has always been of good council."

"Silence," agreed ben Hamza, holding up both hands.

All hushed.

"When the stranger came we gave him hospitality. In return, he helped us. That no man can deny, not even I. But the score is even. Had we wished he would have died. We owe him nothing."

He paused, smiled at Royer, and went on:

"There has been talk of making peace with Rabah Zeir. In this, the Frenchman spoke truth. Rabah Zeir would but bide his time to revenge himself, for he loves his son, el Aziz, who would not forget. Rabah Zeir must appeal to us!"

"Rabah Zeir appeals to no one," was the objection raised.

"There is a first time in everything," ben Hamza resumed. "When he finds I have gathered the Moslems about me, he will seek to settle my quarrel with his son, peacefully. We go on, to Bagirmi."

This seemed to end the discussion. Ben Hamza was the leader. Circumstances had willed that his wishes should be questioned. But he had apparently emerged safely from the controversy. The blacks went back to their fires. The Arabs scattered to direct the lowering of the tents, and to prepare for departure.

Royer, turning, found himself between two guards. He looked at ben Hamza in question.

"I can not allow thee to return to thy people, for thou hast seen, and known about us."

"I am to be taken with you?"

"Yes. And do not act or talk against me, for my leniency is none too great."

"Thou art foolish. Twice I repeat that the French are thy friends."

"I have no friends among the French, not even thee," replied ben Hamza.

He then addressed the guards—

"Take him to his tent, until camp is struck."

Lamuse and Vauclin, white and worried, stood up at his entrance. Royer could not refrain a smile at the irony of the situation. Thirty minutes before he had practically declared them to be his prisoners!

"The wheel of fortune turned, eh?" remarked Vauclin sarcastically, when he became aware that Royer was under guard.

Lamuse smiled broadly, but said nothing. Further speech between them was prevented by the entrance of slaves who removed the furnishings. The three white men were ushered outside while the canvas was lowered, tied in a bundle. Febrile activity was everywhere. There was a new note of confidence among the Arabs, and elation at the thought of a safe return to their families and villages.

Royer watched Lamuse and Vauclin, who in their turn were interested in the loading of a camel. Concern for his future was relegated to the background by an immediate query. Why were the other white men so elated at the departure? During his absence at the council they had found opportunity to question, for they seemed to know the destination. And why were they glad?

Without warning, down the main lane of the camp, a body of Saras approached, marching in cadenced step. They were apparently under drill by their leaders, but Royer felt this was something more than a mere maneuver. His impression was justified when Goualy approached.

"Lieutenant," he began "the French are near. The Saras will come with me. They want to be *Tirailleurs*——"

Before Royer could reply, Vauclin had turned. He instantly recognized the Ouolof, turned quickly and spoke to Lamuse. Lamuse leaned closer to one of the guards. With a sudden lunge he grasped the carbine. Before Royer could reach him, or the other guard could grasp him, he had shot down Goualy.

Royer and Vauclin were seized, Lamuse disarmed. The Saras stood, undecided, staring at the body of their former chief. Others had heard the shot, and soon a crowd had collected.

Ben Hamza, always alert, arrived almost immediately. He listened to the explanation offered by his own men, attempted a conversation with Vauclin, sent for one of the Arabs from Algeria to translate. He ignored Royer.

When the interpreter came, Vauclin stepped forward. He told of Goualy's

attempted treachery, for which, he said, Lamuse had shot him down.

"And why do you tell me this?" ben Hamza asked.

Vauclin informed him that he and Lamuse did not wish to help the French, that they desired most to join ben Hamza. Vauclin enlarged on the treatment he had received at the hands of his compatriots, said he was tired of being a slave without reward. All of which seemed to ring true to ben Hamza. Ben Hamza endeavored to ascertain if Vauclin was a soldier and a leader, if he knew as much as Royer. Through the interpreter, Vauclin explained that, being a captain he knew more, while Lamuse being of the same rank as Royer knew as much. Two were better than one, he added.

Ben Hamza agreed.

A council of the more important chiefs was held, Vauclin and Lamuse, being present. What took place, Royer did not know. He surmised that there were those who questioned Vauclin's ability as a soldier. At any rate, when the little army started south, Royer found himself in a *bassur*. Squatting beside him was a guard. The other guard was astride the animal's neck. Through the curtain, Royer could see the protruding muzzle of his rifle.

Yes, the reversal of fortune was complete.

The long caravan described a curve.

Ahead, boot to boot with ben Hamza, rode Vauclin. Trailing behind, Lamuse drowsed on his horse.

CHAPTER X

RABAH ZEIR concluded his meal of *kouskous* and sweetmeats. El Aziz, near at hand, smoked nervously.

"The hour is grave," remarked Rabah Zeir.

"Indeed?" questioned el Aziz. "We have more men than the French, they are far from their own lands. Come, father, the unfortunate episode of the baggage-train is preying upon thee. The loss was great, truly, but in a year all will be replaced."

"Thou wert too young to remember when we caught the other Frenchmen. They fight well—with their heads. Thy brother was killed fighting them, the third in age among my sons."

"Fear not for me," said el Aziz, but his hand trembled.

Rabah was silent for many minutes.

"Fader el Aziz, my son," he began again, "I would wish thee to go and make thy peace with ben Hamza soon."

"Why?"

"He is behind me, and should I be defeated by the French, I would have no shelter. Come, go and pay him the fifty douros, which I shall give thee, and he will join me."

El Aziz arose.

"I do not wish that," he said.

"I have inquired," resumed Rabah Zeir. "And it seems to me that the fifty douros were rightly due."

"Ben Hamza knew well that I meant the offer in so much as the catch were worth anything."

"Thy words did not make it clear, el Aziz. An offer is an offer."

El Aziz draped the lower part of his burnous over one shoulder, struck an attitude.

"If I am to be humiliated, father, I shall go away and never see thee again. Yes, with a few men who believe in me, I shall go and seek my fortune in Darfur."

As usual, this threat had its effect. Of Rabah's five sons, four had fallen—two in Egypt, the other two in the Wadai and Birgirmi conquests. Remained only El Aziz, the youngest. Even through fatherly eyes, in spite of the love Rabah bore him, he was not the equal of the others. They had been lean, majestic chiefs, brief of speech, and prompt of gesture. El Aziz was talkative, childish and quarrelsome. But El Aziz was his son. And Rabah was seventy years old.

"Stay," he said. "Do nothing in haste. Perhaps all will be well."

He seized his hand and drew him down beside him.

"What purpose would there be for me to fight, son, if thou were to depart for strange lands? Who would follow in Rabah's footsteps? Who would take Bagirmi and Dagana, should Allah grant me to keep them?"

"It is well. I will not go, neither to ben Hamza, nor to Darfur."

"Rabah Zeir, he whose name I took, was my father. My mother was a slave woman, and the law says that the children of slaves are slaves. Nevertheless, my father freed me, for he loved me dearly. I love thee, also, el Aziz. Do not be ashamed of

the slave blood in thee, for it is all the more worthy to achieve command when one comes from low people."

"I take pride in thee, father. And that was the chief cause of my trouble with ben Hamza."

"Ben Hamza, who served me, called me a slave! I know. And yet this hand, which was that of a slave, had held the Wadai and Bagirmi, Bornu and Dagana, Dar Runga and Maga, all within its fingers! Let ben Hamza boast as much, before talking of slaves!" He indicated the outside of the tent. "All these men, who were born free, I command!"

The real caliber of the chief was best revealed in this. Ben Hamza, when pressed by difficulties called council. Rabah acted alone. And no man could say that he ever showed indecision. And his victories had been more numerous than his defeats.

But the old chief realized that on this occasion he was facing an enemy of different caliber, more resolute, less a prey to discouragement. His former victories over the French, the deaths of the isolated explorers, had been purchased dearly. He recalled Paul Brandel, who had fought four hours with his few followers, and had fallen at last, still grasping his elephant-gun. And Lieutenant Normanet, at Buso, who had almost escaped.

But Rabah Zeir got to his feet, and drew his son up beside him.

"Come," he said. "I'll give orders for battle. It will be seen whether Rabah Zeir fears any man."

AND thus it happened, that Rabah Zeir retreating east of Chad, fell back across Bahr el Ghazal, and sought a favorable position on a hill, there to await the invading column. The scouts reported that the French had forded the river, and were marching toward him.

The day was clear. A resplendent sun hung high, and caught in a thousand flashes on the polished steel of the weapons. Among the bushes of the slopes could be seen the gaudy dress of the hundreds of riflemen. A short distance below the knoll, where Rabah sat on his horse, were massed the Bazingirs. There were among them still, gray-haired warriors who had followed him from Egypt.

Stretched in a long cordon in the valley below, the spearmen intermingled with other riflemen. Under cover of huge silk-cotton trees, the riders awaited the moment to charge.

On the right, el Aziz held command.

This would be his first test as a commander. The old chief had so willed. Win or lose, el Aziz would play a part.

From afar came the sound of rifle firing. A perceptible quiver ran down the ranks, the expectancy which precedes action. The scouts were being engaged. The confused murmur which had risen from the men below hushed, and a deep silence reigned. The blacks appeared to sense the importance of the coming conflict, and to realize that upon them depended the Moslem holdings in Central Africa.

The sun seemed to increase in brightness, a good omen, Rabah thought, forgetting that the sun shines for all. Perhaps, the others, the *Roumis*, were also seeing a good omen in the increase of light.

"Just one victory!" begged Rabah Zeir. But in his heart a sense of hopelessness, of impending destruction, sapped at his resolution. But to beholders he appeared his old self, formidable, inscrutable.

A faint rumble far off.

The French?

Yes. Soon, in a clear space between the bushes, appeared the first of the invaders. The red *chechias* stood as crimson flowers on the dusty green of the countryside. Rifle-barrels flashed, each tipped by a pencil of light, which Rabah knew was a bayonet—the dreaded weapon of the *Roumis'* black troopers.

These men were firing as they advanced. The smoke which rose was a faint, grayish haze, almost immediately dispelled.

A puff of creamy-white smoke, then another, stringing out rapidly along the first line as the trade muskets were fired, with their coughing, muffled detonations. The battle was on.

"*Allah Akbar!*" said the leader, calmly putting the issue into the hands of his Master.

The red *chechias* moved in the distance, filing in long lines into depressions, behind bushes. Here and there he recognized Europeans by their white uniforms, and by the badge of brass on the tall, white helmets. Clear, as the peal of the bells in the *Roumis'* churches, came the resounding notes of the bugle. Through the undergrowth the *Tirailleurs* rushed forward. The firing became

intense, then suddenly dwindled to scattering discharges, as the enemy took cover.

Rabah Zeir glanced to the right.

Thus far, the center only had been engaged. The troops of el Aziz held their fire. Rabah turned to one of the riders who formed a group about him.

"The Bazingirs—forward—to meet the enemy!"

As a white comet, the rider flashed down the hillside. The ricocheting bullets sent the earth flying about him in yellowish dust. But he gained his point, untouched.

Calmly, the Bazingirs decended the slope, zigzaging to use all possible cover. They attained the front line, massed, and started on their usual headlong rush. Rabah expected a fierce meeting when his men shocked with the soldiers of the French. But nothing happened! The grayish haze from the *Tirailleurs'* rifles receded. They had avoided the hand-to-hand engagement. The Bazingirs kept on.

Volleys crashed out.

The *Tirailleurs* had fallen back upon their supports, and were holding their ground. The Bazingirs advanced, leaving a trail of fallen. And then, looming above the crest of a knoll, appeared a long line of *Tirailleurs*, who rushed forward with lowered bayonets and met the Bazingirs squarely. A brief struggle, undecided, the edges of the combating lines wavering to and fro. From the sides came other *Tirailleurs*, took the Bazingirs on the flanks, scattered them. The Bazingirs in flight for the first time, were running back toward Rabah Zeir's lines!

Rabah smiled, though his heart swelled with bitterness.

"The riders!" he said briefly.

From the mass of cavalry, a hundred horsemen detached themselves, wound their way down the slope, massed under shelter, and then charged against the *Tirailleurs*. The latter, led by the white-clad Europeans, melted before the attack, disappeared under cover. The riders remained undecided, in small groups, exposed to fearful fire.

Then appeared upon the scene a new foe. Horsemen, clad in red and blue, with floating burnous, wielding long blades. They cut through the riders of Rabah Zeir with ease, though they were greatly outnumbered. With infernal precision, they rolled back Rabah's men using them as a shield against the fire from above.

The chief, understanding the move, was stupefied by the orderly execution.

"They fight well," he muttered, and sent out more riders.

The action developed to the left, as the French engaged more troops. Rabah Zeir had been informed that the enemy's strength was approximately three hundred. He felt sure now there must be more. He had no comprehension of the trained officers' ability to move troops swiftly and deftly from point to point.

But winning minor successes in the valley was child's play compared with the storming of the hill, which must necessarily follow. The half-breed chieftain awaited confidently that moment when the *Tirailleurs* would uncover themselves to begin the ascent. The battle would then take the turn he liked, the confused hand-to-hand struggle, man to man.

At the right, the *Tirailleurs*, in skirmish line, started forward, struggled briefly for a foothold against the covering spearmen. Rabah computed their number. Forty, perhaps. El Aziz commanded over three hundred. He dispatched a rider, ordering his son to hold his ground, reserve fire until the others were within a short distance, when with a single forward surge, surround and overwhelm them.

On his left the attack had lulled.

And Rabah realized that the French had withdrawn from there to finish the attack on the right. He ordered the left to move forward. As expected, the *Tirailleurs* facing the center moved over to cover the left.

Having gathered the remainder of the Bazingirs, he ordered a center attack. There was a resulting confusion in the opposing line.

"*Allah Akbar!*" he repeated, confidently.

His former skill seemed to pour back into him. From his central position he moved his men to meet every onslaught, foreseeing the moves of the enemy, checking him at various points, disquieting him with sudden assaults on unguarded angles. And the feel of victory fired his men, who realized that their leader's perturbance, his indecision, had given place to the old masterly intuition.

Cheers fused from all points of the line.

He glanced to the right.

The attacking *Tirailleurs* had worked their way up the ascent, pushing back the riflemen foot by foot. Even as he looked,

the blue and red riders trotted up the slope in open formation, reached the line of the *Tirailleurs*, passed on, and drove straight at el Aziz's position. And, following them with a headlong rush, freed at last from the restraining hand of the commander, other sections of the *Tirailleurs* bounded up the slope.

"El Aziz will attack now," murmured Rabah Zeir. "He will hold them until I send him help."

Certain of this he ordered an attack on both center and left, to roll up the French force and break it at an angle, shift the ground of conflict, and catch them in the bare plain beyond the bushes, with his riders and spearmen.

"Rabah Zeir!"

The shout reverberated as the spearmen rushed forward. The few *Tirailleurs* before them fell back. Rabah saw success.

Then another shout came from behind—

"They flee!"

"Who flees?"

"El Aziz!"

The right had broken!

"El Aziz will hold until I send help!" Rabah cried. "The fugitives are only spearmen!"

"El Aziz flees! El Aziz flees!"

Yes, conspicuous on his splendid black mount, at the head of his men, rode el Aziz, away from battle. Rabah Zeir covered his face with his hands.

When he looked up, the French were advancing, near at hand. The first bullets sang by. His own maneuver had been taken up and carried out by the enemy. His position was flanked. He swayed in his saddle. His shame and emotion rose up and choked him. Then suddenly he became impassive again. His wrinkled hand grasped the simitar.

"To me!" he cried. "I go to meet the *Roumis!*"

Sublime, hopeless with the unquenchable fire of courage flaming high, he who had slave-blood in his veins, took his place at the head of his riders——

CHAPTER XI

BEN HAMZA was camped on the edge of Dagana.

He had taken the west shore of Lake Chad, crossed Bornu at the greatest possible speed, and halted west of the Shari River not far from the bank of that stream. The camp spraddled in a shallow depression, a huge village of canvas, crowded between the camel-lines and the quarters of the black warriors. Relatively secure for the first time in weeks, there was an atmosphere of general cheerfulness, of pleasing leisure.

The Arab chief did not dare enter Bagirmi and Dagana while the issue between the French and Rabah remained unsettled. Being on the west side of the river, he was secure from a surprize attack and could shift his plans to meet the consequence of victory on either side. The help he had expected from the inhabitants of the region had not been forthcoming. The negroes were apathetic, did not seem to wish to engage in fighting. The more warlike were already with ben Hamza or Rabah Zeir.

Warned by previous experiences, ben Hamza had formed a series of outposts across the river, in order to relay the news of an approaching enemy. In this manner he had followed Rabah's retreat across the Bahr el Ghazal, and six hours after the start of the battle, received the news.

He immediately convoked a council.

Vauclin, through the interpreter, urged that ben Hamza move to Rabah Zeir's help, and conclude the conflict by the crushing of the French under the avalanche of fresh warriors. In this, he was supported by several chiefs. Ben Hamza stubbornly held that there could be no reconciliation between himself and Rabah.

"Why should we give in now?" he asked. "When we have fought two battles! It is only a question of time when Rabah gives in to us!"

Further discussion was prevented by the sound of galloping horses at the eastern end of the camp. Riders appeared, the men detached to guard the ford of the Shari—two miles away.

"El Aziz is coming! He has surrendered to our outpost, and follows behind peacefully, with but ten followers——"

It was evident that Rabah Zeir was meeting with defeat.

Royer, with his two guards who were as his shadow, stood in the outskirts of the circle of listeners. A thrill passed over him. The French were masters of Dagana!

He saw Vauclin receive the information from the interpreter. He turned to Lamuse, who blanched suddenly when the little captain whispered the news.

Excitement ran high. Speculation as to Rabah's situation gave way to the immediate interest in the meeting between ben Hamza and el Aziz. Men were already streaming out to be present at the interview. Ben Hamza, with an instinct for the theatrical, set the scene. He stood alone in the center of the open space, his guards thirty feet behind. The people of the camp crowded about, the multi-colored costumes forming a riot of color under the blazing sun.

Then el Aziz appeared, riding slowly, dejected, hopeless.

Fader el Aziz, son of the Conqueror, halted his men, and advanced alone, right hand held up in sign of peace. Ben Hamza, motionless as a statue, his splendid figure resplendent in the snowy white burnous, with the red head-scarf making a splash of vivid scarlet above his bronzed face, waited.

Close by, el Aziz reined his horse, bowed his head, and handed his enemy a skin sack, the fifty douros, cause of the controversy. With a magnificent gesture ben Hamza scattered the coins in the direction of the negro riflemen, who scrambled about, ludicrously eager for the precious disks. Then, ben Hamza offered his hand to el Aziz.

"Greetings, el Aziz, son of Rabah," he said. "My tent is thine!"

El Aziz, his humiliation plain on his coarse features, bowed again.

"And thy father?" questioned ben Hamza.

"He is in need of thee."

"I go," ben Hamza replied.

Ben Hamza suited action to the word. Preparations were immediately under way. The first of the riflemen moved toward the river, soon followed by the bulk of the riders. Camp was struck. Royer, again in the *bassur* with his two guards, followed the caravan. El Aziz, he knew, was riding by ben Hamza's side at the front. He did not know the whereabouts of Vauclin and Lamuse.

The swaying of the camel beneath him, the close confinement of the "woman basket" as he nicknamed his prison, stirred him to nervous laughter. In sight of success, the French would doubtless fail, for ben Hamza's forces, joined to Rabah Zeir's, would compose a formidable foe.

Suddenly, the column came to a halt. Confused shouts rose from the mass of men.

"Frenchman! Frenchman!"

He recognized Ben Hamza's voice. He leaned out. The Arab was beside the camel, looking up.

"Rabah Zeir has been slain!"

"Slain?"

"And his forces scattered!"

"And what dost thou wish of me, thy prisoner?" Royer asked, hope running high.

"I must save my lands. I wish thee to make my peace with thy people!"

The camel kneeled. Lieutenant Royer leaped to the ground.

"Hurry!" cried ben Hamza. "Thy people are on the other side of the Shari!"

With a white scarf depending from a pole, Royer approached the Spahis. A young second lieutenant rode forward to meet him, shouting in bad Arabic. Royer smiled.

"Welcome," he said, in the same tongue. "I would speak with thy commander. I wish to make peace!"

HE FOUND Major Camard with a group of officers, surveying ben Hamza's forces from a rise of ground.

Camard approached and greeted him in Arabic. Royer went through the usual compliments, aware that Camard was scrutinizing him keenly.

"I offer ben Hamza's submission," Royer concluded. "He accepts the protectorate over Dagana and Bagirmi, on condition that he holds his title."

"Agreed."

Then Camard spoke up in amazement—

"Lieutenant Royer!"

"The same."

"The —— if I knew you with that beard! What does it all mean!"

Explanations followed.

"And Vauclin and Lamuse?" Camard asked. "Are they in camp now?"

"To the best of my knowledge."

"We'll make short shrift of them!"

"Won't they be sent back to France for trial?"

"And allow them to struggle through the courts for months? Did they give Bornier a chance?"

"Bornier——"

"Lieutenant-Colonel Bornier. When he heard they had entered British territory, he hurried ahead to take command. They shot him down like a dog. The Spahis with him escaped. As for the *Tirailleurs*, we found them in the Tagamar hills. They deserted their officers after the killing. But where is ben Hamza?"

"On the neutral side of the Shari, in Kamerun-land. He will come over into Dagana as soon as he is given permission. Now that he has accepted control, he will bow to Fate like a true Moslem and say, 'It is written.' "

Ben Hamza was summoned. He was jovial, friendly. He called Royer "brother" and promised magnificent presents. As for Vauclin and Lamuse, they were gone. They had fled with el Aziz for the interior of Bornu.

Camard showed his disappointment.

"If Ben Hamza will grant me Bu Kach and a few riders—" Royer began.

"I will," smiled ben Hamza, anxious to gain gavor.

And once again, Royer left the French.

BUT not for long.

He found Vauclin and Lamuse. Their death had not been swift or painless. It was ironical justice that they should have been killed by el Aziz, who feared the French as much as they. But they were *Roumis*, and he had his father's death to avenge.

El Aziz seemed to find a degree of courage. For some months he raided the French side of the Shari, retreating into German territory when pursued. At last Royer and a detachment of ben Hamza's riders went out, breaking international law on the principle that el Aziz was a bandit and not a recognized leader. They entered Kamerun. Fader el Aziz, last son of Rabah Zeir, died as he had lived, a coward. Bu Kach's sword entered his back as he was again fleeing, deserting his followers.

Ben Hamza had scribbled his complicated signature at the bottom of a treaty. The Chad region was conquered. The Wadai, last rampart of the Moslem power in Central Africa, was already challenged. The advance progressed. The patient toil of the newcomers, though lacking the spectacular color of Royer's exploit, moved on to the ultimate end.

DEER "BLEATS" AND COUGARS

by **Faunce Rochester**

CAPTAIN RANDOLPH B. MARCY, who spent several years beginning with 1849 in exploring the country along the Canadian River, of the Arkansas, and the heads of the Brazos, Trinity and Colorado rivers of Texas, tells of his surprize one day when John Bushman, his interpreter, used a "deer-bleat," and not only called a doe to him but a fawn at the heels of the mother; and behind these a huge panther. John bagged the panther instead of the doe.

The "bleat," believed to have been originated by the Delaware Indians, resembles somewhat the first joint of a clarionet, the brass reed being scraped very thin and nicely adjusted until it reproduces almost exactly the cry of the fawn. They were used during June and July before the does weaned their young. The "bleat" can be heard for half a mile, and was used near clumps of trees, or brush, where a doe might be lying. As the doe leaves her young after suckling it, and goes aside and makes her bed alone, she assumes her offspring is in danger and hastens to its defense. (Scarcely a sportsmanlike way of securing game unless one be starving.)

But the hunter using the "bleat" did not always have it all his own way, and he, like the little mother, sometimes ran a grave risk. For as the cry more precisely imitates that of the fawn the more likely is the panther, wolf or bear to be deceived and rush in to secure a tender feast. The Indians always attributed the survival of deer in a carnivorous country to the absence of any scent left by a fawn until it is old enough to outrun its enemies. When full grown it will leave a scent much stronger than that of almost any other animal.

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THE following is really a letter to me instead of the customary self-introduction of a writer on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. Perhaps I was expected to find in it only a few things I'd judge the rest of you would be interested in, but—well, I can't see my way to omitting any of it.

Chattanooga, Tennessee.

I must say that I rather shrink from speaking directly about myself in such fashion, although I recognize and can only approve the custom in the magazine. It is wholly desirable, and a very friendly thing. Perhaps you will allow me to indicate a few facts, along with preferences and dislikes, which commonly gage a man better than any attempt of his own to set out things about himself.

TODAY, March fifth, is my forty-first birthday. I saw the light in the prosaic but useful State of New Jersey, in Elizabeth (of which, with the Amboys, and Newark, members of my family had been settlers). I was educated in Connecticut and New York City, at the Berkeley School in the latter. I later went to Columbia University and then to Harvard, and finally took a graduate course in Columbia again.

I wrote and sold my first story to *Outdoors* in 1905. Just after selling that story within three days to the first magazine I sent it to, I got into the newspaper game, starting in as reporter on the old Port Chester *Daily Record*. We were strongly Democratic, and a local reform sheet operating in that field, in Westchester County, N. Y. I rose to be editor and held various political offices. I had to resign from no less than fourteen different organizations when I made up my mind in the Summer of 1909 that I had had enough of that side of things and that I'd better make a radical change.

I ENTERED the Berkeley Divinity School, Middletown, Conn., in the Autumn of 1909, graduated three years later, and was ordained a deacon in the Episcopal Church June 5, 1912. I served my deacon's year in a Connecticut mill-town parish, and was called as rector "to take place after his [my] ordination to the priesthood," several months

before I was eligible to take a parish of my own, in Christ Church, Middletown, Conn., the same city where my academic preparation for the ministry had taken place. I was rector there for four years. I then came to N. Y. City where I was in charge of a department of one of the great metropolitan parishes for more than two years. Then I went to Boston where I was for several years senior member of the staff of the Church of the Advent, under the famous Dr. van Allen, rector. Dr. van Allen devours *Adventure* periodically and is one of its most enthusiastic admirers. I started in to write short stories seriously two years ago.

I left there to do special work in the Virgin Islands of the U. S. A., and returned to the U. S. only last November, the occasion being that my father, who is 75, and one of the very best, was in St. Luke's Hospital and not expected to live. I have been here in Chattanooga, carrying on for a very good friend of mine, rector of Christ Church, since the end of December, while my friend the rector takes a much-needed vacation. My father, contrary to all expectation, recovered, and is now in good condition again, bless him!

Recently I have been elected rector of Trinity Church, Bridgeport, Conn., and should enter upon the duties September first.

I AM in no way a remarkable person except perhaps that I have a capacity for acquiring a really extraordinarily diversified lot of friends. I take the keenest enjoyment in my friends, for I am naturally a gregarious person—a friendly soul. These range through all manners and conditions of men, women and children. They include ships' surgeons in the passenger trade, some social lights, any number of nice little girls, college fellers, professors, artists, writing men, colored people, Jewish highbrows and lowbrows, Danes, Kalmucks, Finns, old Doc Parry who used to be Buffalo Bill's vet, Caruso's father-in-law, Robert Henri, Dick Culter, Wallace Goodrich, Dean of the Boston Conservatory of Music, the Archbishop of the British West Indies, a considerable group of broken-down old ladies, an enormous number of the insane (for I was, along with my Middletown rectorship, chaplain of the Conn. State Insane Hospital), "working-girls," a few yeggs, a bunch of actors and actresses of all kinds including a bunch of the girls who used to be in the Hippodrome chorus and who used to come to me when I was a parson in N. Y. for advice, etc.—all kinds of people. I love 'em all, and delight in their society.

MY CHIEF interests—the things I like to do—include certainly the following: Being at sea. Hunting small game with a good setter-dog. All kinds of athletic exercises. The good Lord gave me a lot of health and I've always thought it worth while to keep hold of it and use it. Amusing a lot of kids (as at a boys' camp, for instance) with stories and faking on a guitar while I sing a lot of junk to them. Having a couple of nice little girls cuddle up to me one on each side on a big sofa and carrying on a conversation with them, letting them do most of the talking.

Of course I like to write. I've written with a certain ideal in mind, I think, always. That is to turn out stuff that is not hackneyed, and that is worked out into good form. I am, at least partly, indebted to certain expressed ideals of Gouverneur Morris for that last. I like to write stories that are not only somewhat different from the usual types, but also to preserve a certain difference among those I manage to produce. I have written successfully in the essay form for a number of years. I find the carrying on of my professional duties comparatively easy, and I enjoy them very much.

I DISLIKE cats, both kinds—real cats and people who are cats rather than dogs. I am intensely disliked by both kinds of cats myself. I hate anything like false formality, although I like the European manners, customs and the usual courteousness and precision which characterize Continental social relationships. Many of my friends are foreigners whom I have met abroad or here in the United States. I am a "Good American." But I feel that I love my land so much, deep down, that I ought to do my small bit to help in eradicating the national faults which constantly intrigue the attention of foreigners, even well-disposed foreigners. I dislike our crudities where these occur, though I invariably champion our cause with all the dialectic skill which I have tried to acquire in my two professional careers of political writer and clergyman.

As an example of something—I'm not sure what—perhaps the strange disparity between what we necessarily think of ourselves and "as others see us," I am appending extracts from a letter written by a Santa Cruz (Virgin Islands) official to a friend of his in the United States about me. This friend was a mutual friend, and handed me on the letter. He thought it would please me. It did, but I must admit, chiefly as a kind of curiosity. It is rarely, I suppose, that one has the experience of reading a letter like this about himself. If he gets such a chance, it is commonly a look-in into some adverse opinion!

"HE IS the strongest man, physically, I ever saw. Soon after he came here to Santa Cruz, it was discovered that he took a great deal of exercise. One evening he was asked to do a 'stunt' for a large group of people who were having an old-fashioned Crucian jollification, and he called for a pack of cards. He tore them squarely in half, and then quartered them. I had heard of cards being torn in two, but never quartered. Incredulity was expressed. The people present thought it was a trick, and said so, though pleasantly and in a bantering way. Father Whitehead asked for another pack to destroy, and for two wire nails. He nailed the pack through at both ends, so that the cards could not be 'beveled,' and then quartered that pack. He had to do this everywhere he went after that. Everybody wanted to see it done. One night Mrs. Scholten, the wife of our Danish Bank manager, gave him a small pack of brand-new Danish cards. They were made of linen! He tore those in two.

" . . . He has put old St. Paul's back the way it was in its palmy days, when Alexander Hamilton and the great gentry of the Island drove to service in their coaches. Everybody comes now to hear him preach. He likes form, like all High Churchmen, and he applies this to his household. He drives out on his parish visits in the car with his chauffeur in a white livery and a chauffeur's hat which he sent for to New York. One of his house

boys has the same kind of a hat and the same white suit, and the parson coming along the road certainly looks like the old parish had got something to run her that's prosperous. The car is a Ford, too.

". . . The Danes are strong for him, for he knows all their little manners and customs. He goes to all the 'big doin's' on the Island, and shows them how.

". . . I don't see how he does the things he does. His physical strength is incredible. I was in his house one day when they were moving one of his big mahogany bedsteads. That wood is as hard as iron and almost as heavy. This was a four-poster, square, and must have weighed a ton by the looks of it. He picked up the heavy end, the head, with one hand and carried it across the room and set it down, like me lifting a waste basket. It took four able-bodied men to lug the other end along, two lifting under the headboard and the other two at the sides down at the foot end.

". . . He keeps the police court calendar clear because when any of the negroes at St. Paul's get into a mess he makes them bring it to him and he tries the case. He sits there and runs it like clockwork, and he picked up the Crucian Creole that the black people speak in about two weeks."

THIS letter interested me very much. As usual the people of Santa Cruz were most interested in what I didn't go there to do—strong-man stunts. The card thing I have practised since I was about seventeen, and the bed-lifting wasn't what it sounds, because the "four able-bodied men" were a negro joiner and his three young men assistants, and they are fungy-eaters (hard-boiled corn meal), which doesn't give them the stamina to lift mahogany beds very easily. A couple of husky Micks could have done it easily—the whole bed.

Maybe you can get something out of this mess; maybe not. But I know I'd hash it if I tried to write anything like a biographical introduction.—HENRY S. WHITEHEAD.

THE Great Pyramid again—the possibility of an underground canal that connected it with the Nile:

Toronto, Canada.

Talbot Mundy's reply in your issue of April 30th to the criticism of Mr. Cummins contains many points of interest, and I would like to refer to that one in his second paragraph, where he says: "I don't believe that Cheops built the Pyramid. And there certainly never was an underground, or any other kind, of canal connecting the Great Pyramid with the Nile; and that for the simple reason that the base of the Pyramid stands too high above Nile high-water level. I used the old legend about a canal as a plot for the story," etc.

THERE was a book published in 1898 by Rand, McNally Co. for Le Roy Hooker, entitled "Enoch the Philistine," in the preface to which the author writes: "The account of the lock built at the end of canal in Gizeh, certainly the first engineering work of the kind ever made by man, is not to be discredited because the foundation of the Pyramid is now one hundred feet above the level of the Nile. There are evidences to show that at some far distant period an earthquake, or other cosmic disturbance, elevated the country to the west of the Nile. Witness, "the river without water," whose bed is yet plainly to be seen several miles westward from the Nile and parallel to its course. In that early convulsion of nature the plateau of the west was thrown up so high that the waters once flowing in the now dry river-bed, and fertilizing the soil bordering upon it, found way to the sea through the channel of the Nile and left the plateau a desert. In all probability the rock whereon Enoch founded the Pyramid was not more than thirty feet above the level of the river at the time of building."

Mr. Mundy refers to this same earthquake in the third paragraph of his reply. Mr. Hooker also takes Mr. Mundy's view that the Pyramid was not a tomb, nor built by Cheops, though his character Enoch is not the one mentioned in the Old Testament.—N. W. J. HAYDON.

A LINE or two from a comrade who says "not an adventurer myself—just wander, kind of." He gave a version he had heard of "Old King Brady," which he'd heard from the lips of a drunken hobo while the two of them were watching the glare of a burning barn. "You see, a girl was burned in the barn, and they lynched the tramp later, as I read in a paper, but it was a fool thing to do, as he was with me before the fire started, half a mile away. I did not go back. He was dead."

HE'S right, is Eugene Cunningham of our writers' brigade, and I think you'll say the same. For years our writers have followed the custom of introducing themselves to Camp-Fire. But not our artists. Why not? Only because we in the office fell asleep at the switch.

Many of these artists of ours have done a full share of adventuring on their own hook and all of them are good fellows and sit quietly around our Camp-Fire, doing no talking.

A common idea seems to be that an artist is a lady-like fellow with long hair and a large flowing tie. You can't pick any of our artists out of a crowd by any such earmarks, and I have to laugh when I think of what would happen if you called some of them lady-like to their faces. Some of these "lady-like" chaps carry a wallop I'd hate to stop. And at least one or two of them are none too reluctant about using it.

San Francisco.

While fishing around my shelf of *Adventures* the covers impressed me in a way they've never done before. Like most steady readers, the moment I yank off the wrapper I study the cover, to decide if I like it as well as some others, and so on. But until today it never occurred to me that I've been looking at them for about twelve years without hearing one of them speak!

LIKE this: *Adventure* has the most individual covers of any magazine published, most of them *seem* to be done by men who know their subjects. While artists, I realize, are generally looked down upon and all that, so were writers a few years ago and it's time the general public's attitude changed and artists permitted to engage in social intercourse with the rest of us. But seriously, if a man paints an old-time Western stage-driver and does it well, chances are that painter is himself an interesting character; has something to say. Why not give him the same call to stand up in Camp-Fire and say if he caught his tiger in Darkest Africa or the Bronx? Nowadays, all he gets is a curt by-line at the tail-end of "Contents." We who read and chance to wonder about him get—the same. Here is the magazine with the personal touch between editor-writer-reader developed as in none other, yet a contributor to its make-up has no say. It doesn't seem fair, from either readers' or painters' standpoint.

Of course, if I've been asleep and the cover-people have had their say, *estar bien!* If some reason prevents the painters from introducing themselves to us, I apologize once more. But I wonder. . . .
—EUGENE CUNNINGHAM.

DON'T forget that "Still Farther Ahead," added to "The Trail Ahead," now gives you a general survey of what the next four issues of our magazine will contain.

THIS letter from T. S. Stribling was in reply to a letter from one of you who apparently thought Mr. Stribling's "Fombombo" merely ridiculed Americans and who apparently enjoyed this supposed ridicule:

My dear Mr. ——:

May I acknowledge your very kind letter of July 31 and tell you how much I appreciate such a letter from a reader of one of my stories?

I am very glad you like the savor of the satire in "Fombombo," but although I have written this, still I want to say personally I have great hope and admiration for America and the Americans.

You see, over here we are doing a perfectly amazing thing—trying to elevate the mass of our population to a rational plane. That is what casts down our general average so tremendously—our mode of determining what is the general average of American intelligence.

For example, in my book "Fombombo," I am comparing our middle-class intelligence with that of the intellectual class of South America.

Such a comparison is necessary because South America has no middle class. Down there they have peons who would go nowhere in such a test, and the wealthy classes who have had the advantage of leisure and training. So in "Fombombo" I am contrasting the ordinary workaday bustling American salesman with members of an intellectual aristocracy.

NOW of course the droll part about my book, and the satirical part, is the conceit of this American salesman among men who are far above him. But after all conceit is no crime. It is really a disease of youth. I have seldom met a boy of strength and talent but that he had a goodly portion of conceit in his make-up. That is what ails the North American in South America. He is young, conceited and extremely droll to observe. I am perfectly willing to write satires about him, and about America in general, but I still think, that by and large, Americans are the most hopeful, finest group of people I know anything about.

Certainly America is wide open to satire, just as is everything youthful, impulsive and incautious, but I want you to read my bit of irony with the distinct understanding that it is tempered with affection and well soaked in the milk of human kindness.—T. S. STRIBLING.

"SWAIN'S STONE," by Arthur D. Howden Smith, in our August 20 issue, was selected within a month of its publication for inclusion in an anthology of sea stories which Small, Maynard & Co., of Boston, are publishing this Winter. We have more *Swain* stories to come.

THE following from one of the many of you who have written to protest against the proposed anti-weapon laws.

Detroit.

The fundamental idea and basic principle of Law is the protection of the weak against the aggressions of the strong. Any law that violates this fundamental principle must be a bad one. All laws that curtail the right of the decent citizen to carry firearms for protection are in direct contravention of this principle, and therefore are vicious.

If it were possible to destroy absolutely all pistols, blackjacks, brass knuckles, etc., how would the average citizen be any safer than he is now? The burly crook, secure in the knowledge that his victim possessed no lethal weapon, would work his will in perfect safety.

Instead of laws and ordinances against the carrying of firearms, every good citizen should be encouraged to arm himself, and only criminals should be denied this right. If this were done there would be an immediate decrease in the number of crimes of violence.—F. R. WATSON.

CERTAINLY looks as if it were up to Mr. Brininstool to present his side of the case:

American Bison Society, Clifton, New Jersey.

My attention has recently been called to an article in the Camp-Fire section of *Adventure*, issue of July 30, 1923, in which you have published something about the buffalo. This is rather old stuff, but nevertheless true and authentic history, all of which can be easily verified—that is, all except the last paragraph which bears the signature of E. A. Brininstool who starts in by saying:

"Here is something that will interest the Camp-Fire readers. Did you ever hear or know that the story of that Salt Lake buffalo herd is a fake?"

Now, while I am not seeking any controversy with Mr. Brininstool's New York friend, I am just

naturally plumb curious to know what part of the history of the John E. Dooley buffalo herd on Antelope Island in Great Salt Lake, Utah, is a fake.

SURELY the State of Utah is no fake, nor Great Salt Lake, nor Antelope Island in the lake, nor the present herd of about 200 buffalo that were established on the island about twenty-five years ago by the late John E. Dooley, nor the fact that his heirs leased the island and buffalo to a cattle company who wanted to dispose of the buffalo and proposed to slaughter the entire herd in one fell swoop by issuing permits at $200 each for the privilege of killing the buffalo and, as published in the *World*, all true conservationists and thousands of others rose up and protested against this wholesale slaughter of the buffalo. The true sportsmen who had obtained permits, when they realized the true situation and how unpopular the scheme was, forfeited their permits, canceled their hotel reservations and quietly faded away, not caring to have their names associated with any such unsportsmanlike method of slaughtering an animal so near extinction. Further, the good citizens of the State of Utah were so intensely aroused over the impending doom of their only herd of buffalo that action was taken by their representative at Washington, who introduced a bill in Congress carrying an appropriation of $300,000 for the purpose of purchasing Antelope Island, $30,000 of the above amount to be used in purchasing the buffalo. Surely this was no fake. However, the cattle company, still holding to their original plans, on the appointed and much advertised day allowed the hunt to proceed which resulted in a few of the buffalo being killed—a full account of which was published in 'most all of the newspapers and a number of magazines together with photographs of the hunters and the slaughtered buffalo—and this was no fake, so, as I said before, I certainly am curious to know what part of it is the fake that Mr. Brininstool is asking the readers of *Adventure* if they have ever heard or known about.

IF MR. BRININSTOOL and his New York friend had been in the position of those who were exerting all their efforts for the salvation of those buffalo, they would have found that it was indeed no fake, but hard work. However, all this transpired some years ago and is now history and I may also add that the article by Mr. Seymour—that part stating the usefulness of the buffalo—was a part of his speech delivered to the citizens of Asheville, North Carolina, in 1916 and was widely published in full in a great number of newspapers and magazines of that year, which subsequently resulted in the establishing by the American Bison Society of a herd of buffalo on the Pisgah National Forest and Game Preserve in North Carolina. The American Bison Society was organized in 1905 for the purpose of preserving the buffalo from becoming extinct.

The Society takes an annual census of all living, pure-blooded buffalo throughout the world and has preserved in its records the history of all known herds, origin, blood, etc., and it also points with pride to the magnificent herd of over 400 buffalo, established by this Society in 1911 on the Montana Bison Range near Dixon, Montana.

Now, I'm getting away off the subject and writing much more than I intended, but am still curious to know what part of the Salt Lake herd is a fake, and would be very glad if Mr. Brininstool will enlighten me on that point.—N. S. GARRETSON, Secretary, 414 Clifton Ave., Clifton, New Jersey.

A REPORT from one of our comrades concerning a man inquired for by some of you:

Newburgh, New York.

Count me in, have felt myself one of you for the past year or two, but failed to send for my button until now.

FROM time to time I have noticed inquiries regarding "Buck" Taylor and for these inquirers I am led to believe I have later information regarding him than any one so far, so here goes. The last time I saw Buck was in 1908. He was then living at Betzwood, Pennsylvania, and acting as superintendent of the Betz Estate, who operated several large farms in Montgomery County. He had formerly been in charge of the Loose barns. At that time Buck was well along in years, had a quantity of long gray hair which he coiled up and fastened with hairpins under his sombrero. He was still very powerful and vigorous. Until about 1904 he still retained his ability as a roper to a remarkable degree and could also pick off stray dogs with a deadly aim at 400 or 500 yards.

I DROPPED in to see Buck on a matter of business one day, just as he was putting the finishing touches to an English coachman employed on the place. There had been some argument, and the coachman told Buck he would put him in the horse-trough. Thereupon Buck landed. His fist was a bad-looking mess, but he used his other to gather up the coachman and souse him around in the water-trough. The whole thing was most amusing, as Buck seemed so good-natured over it, not even peeved over his fist, and, in spite of the fact the other man was nearly his equal in size, treated the whole affair as a joke. Needless to say the coachman beat it the same day.

As I mentioned, I last saw Buck in 1908. At that time he was no longer active, having grown very heavy—drove around in a buckboard to attend his duties, but was in good health. I doubt, however, if he is still living. He was planning to buy a small place at Valley Forge and end his days there. He was always a happy, cheerful person to meet and acted like a big, frank, overgrown boy. Every one liked him.

Trusting the above may be of interest to some of the Camp-Fire readers, I am—B. L. JOHNSON.

HOW about the "outside loop" in flying? Is it impossible?

New York.

Referring to the "outside loop" in flying. I have never seen this stunt completed either in stationary or rotary motored planes, and I have seen some of the best stunt flyers in the Royal Air Force. At Camp Hicks, near Fort Worth, Texas, I twice saw Curtiss JN4 Canadian Type planes come from over 3000 feet to the ground in an upside-down dive, seemingly entirely out of control, and this is one position you have to go through in an outside loop.

TRAINING in England I accidentally got into this position myself in a Sopwith Camel, with a 140 H.P. Clerget rotary motor. I was trying to get an absolutely vertical dive, and cut under by mistake. As soon as the plane passed the vertical, the rudder and elevators became limp and useless, and after a short dive the plane went naturally into a slow outside spin, from which I was able to recover by jockeying the motor.

I believe that in the upside-down dive position the slip-stream from the wings, which is a partial vacuum at high speed, envelops the tail surfaces, making them useless, and I do not see how the loop could be completed. My one experience with the cut-under dive put the wind up in me so high I would not try it again under any consideration, nor would any of the other men in the squadron in France.

This is an interesting subject to me, and I hope we get some other dope on it.—JOHN R. HOGAN, Ex-2nd. Lieut., 148th U. S. Air Squadron.

IN CONNECTION with his story in this issue a few words from Eugene Cunningham:

San Francisco.

We used to comment much—my trailmate and I—upon the marvelous similarity of one Central American and the next. They seemed to be cut in uniform lengths from the same brown bolt, albeit the fabric was sometimes shot with patterns of exotic lightness, when we stared through some hombre's *gray* eyes back to an ancestor of alien blood. But the inner man always fascinated, very often eluded, while I studied these folk as in other lines I had studied the Mexicans. Occasionally there came under the microscope such a one as *Antonio*, who was really Rafael, for two good days our guide in central Costa Rica. Then there was opportunity to glimpse the native mind and I found it well worth study.

This little yarn *is* off-trail, but not too much so, I hope. It's just *Antonio's* story, which I have sharpened to a fictive point.—EUGENE CUNNINGHAM.

WAR, though we must be prepared against it, is criminal idiocy. With every new invention for wholesale slaughter, it becomes more criminal and more idiotic. Secret diplomacy, in the hands of a comparative handful, often influenced by other small handfuls having selfish financial matters at stake, is largely responsible for wars and for the situations leading to them. The people themselves, who must do the actual fighting and bear the actual suffering, are not allowed to decide whether they shall have war or peace. That, of course, is unjust and ridiculous, but we are used to it and stupidly accept it as a natural arrangement. It is hereditary, but decidedly unnatural.

Isn't it time to change things and let those who must fight the war decide whether they shall have one? The peoples of the various nations are much less eager for war than are the handfuls who at present shape the people's affairs. If there was ever a question demanding a referendum to the people themselves it is the vital one of whether the people themselves shall face death or life. With the real decision in the hands of the whole people, the handful of diplomats and statesmen would find two of their chief tools, war and the threat of war, not so easy to their hands.

THIS morning's paper printed a plan suggested by Thomas R. Marshall, former vice-president of the United States. By the time this reaches you it may be either forgotten or a matter of general consideration. To me it seems to have that great merit simplicity and the great merit of being fundamental. For those reasons, if for no other, it will call forth loud cries of opposition. Furthermore, for all its simplicity, it is new, and anything new, however good, is assured of vigorous opposition. Being essentially and soundly democratic, it is assured of still further opposition.

But it is the only basis on which any world tribunal can successfully exist. What follows is taken verbatim from Mr. Marshall's statement of his plan:

There is an unseen yet nevertheless felt fear that the documents written by the statesmen of the world may again become scraps of paper if they stand in the way of personal or national ambition. All these documents have been written by the men who make the wars, and not by the men who fight them.

I MODESTLY suggest that if we are to consider new ways of helping to measurably assure peace in the world, we reverse the process; suppose we try the experiment of permitting the people who do the fighting and pay the bills to determine the question. I know that the world around the universal cry is "peace," but I have no means of knowing whether the whole world or even half of it wants peace.

If the world and the people thereof do not desire it, all documents guaranteeing it are "as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean." If the people of the nations of the world, or a great majority of them, are really desirous of having peace, I am vain enough to believe that I know the steps whereby they can attain unto their hearts' desire.

THROUGH diplomatic channels, let the Government of the United States propose to the several nations of the world that the organic law of every civilized people shall be so altered as to provide that no war shall ever be waged until after the question of the waging thereof has been submitted to a referendum of all men and women about 18 years of age, and not then until sixty days have expired after the announcement of the result of the referendum; that all officers, soldiers, and sailors in the

Army and Navy of the country shall be sworn not to leave the territorial land or water of the country and wage war until after the referendum shall have directed them so to do; and that every person who shall either give or obey an order without this authorization shall be taken to be an international criminal, subject to trial for the offense in an international criminal court; none of these changes to become effective until the great Powers and two-thirds of all the nations have agreed thereto.

THAT then an international criminal court shall be established consisting of one judge from each nation, and to it shall be given authority to promulgate rules with reference to this international crime of making war, without authority, to fix the grades of punishment that are to be inflicted upon the violators of the law; providing that all who ordered the war without authority and all who led the armies and navies in the war without such lawful authority shall be guilty of homicide against the peace and dignity of the world, and upon conviction thereof shall suffer death; that those who obey orders, upon conviction thereof, shall be found guilty of homicide in the second degree and shall suffer punishment by imprisonment for such term as the court may decree; and, finally, that by international treaties all the other nations of the world, in the event of this unlawful waging of war, shall send army and naval forces, arrest the offenders and bring them before the international criminal tribunal for hearing and trial.

Under the plea of "not guilty" in such court no defense shall be intervened save that the persons charged did not unlawfully engage in the war or that the war was waged in self-defense after an attack by some other nation. Either of these defenses disclosed by the evidence shall require an acquittal at the hands of the court.

This is just a skeleton. But, as discussion of ways and means is to go on, I respectfully submit it for such consideration as its merits, if any, may justify.—THOMAS R. MARSHALL.

FROM an old-timer of the West who wants to hear from others. Here's to his finding them. The following is from a letter to W. C. Tuttle.

Hannibal, Missouri.

Have been all over the West. Am 72 years old and can tell you something about the West—lived there all my life, from old Missouri to Salt Lake. Have seen Indians and buffaloes by the thousand. Knew Bill Cody, Bill Hickock and knew the Bender gang. Have seen old Geronimo, Apache chief; he had a lariat made of human hair. Never slept in a house for twenty years.

Would like to hear from some of the old-timers that have hit the trail up the Republican River or the Platte or old Missouri River up to Fort Bent.

Can you tell us anything about old Roman Nose, Cheyenne chief, or old Red Cloud?—J. W. BREWER.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

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Arkansas—161—Hot Springs. Tom Manning, Jr., 322 Morrison Ave.

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142—Meriden. Homer H. Brown, 1 Colony Place.

D. C.—167—Washington. Walter A. Sheil, 503 Sixth St. N. E.

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128—Titusville. Max von Koppelow, Box 1014.
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139—St. Petersburg. Capt. Lee Whetstone, Hotel Poinsettia.
143—St. Petersburg. J. G. Barnhill, 10 Third St. N.
158—Crescent City. E. N. Clark, care *Courier*.
179—Key West. William McCarthy, 201 Fleming St.
188—Johnson. Clifford Martin.

Georgia—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald*.

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180—Warsaw. Homer Lewis.

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66—Mt. Carmel. W. C. Carter, 1122 Chestnut St.
67—Plainfield. J. P. Glass, The Linshield Co.
189—Chicago. Herman A. Schell, 8708 Vincennes Ave.

Kentucky—144—Corbin. Keith Mauney.
190—Louisville. H. S. Summers, 421 W. Jefferson St.

Louisiana—191—Neita. Wm. P. Stephens.
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Maine—19—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.

59—Augusta. Robie M. Liscomb, 73½ Bridge St.
111—Lewiston. Howard N. Lary, 714 Main Street.

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82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.
151—Williamsport. L. J. Schaefer. Frederick St.

Michigan—69—Grand Rapids. Dr. A. B. Muir, 1133 Lincoln Ave., N. W.
79—Lansing. Geo. H. Allen, *Lansing Industrial News*, 109½ N. Washington Ave.
106—Gaylord. Sidney M. Cook.
131—North Muskegon. James Fort Forsyth, Forsyth Publisher's Service, Phone 5891.
137—Flint. O'Leary & Livingston, 309 So. Saginaw St.
192—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.

Minnesota—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.
145—Brainerd. F. T. Tracey, care Brainerd Gas & Electric Co.
181—Ortonville. T. Glenn Harrison. *The Ortonville Independent.*

Mississippi—88—Tunica. C. S. Swann, Box 244.
99—Picayune. D. E. Jonson.

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94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.
127—Salem. Emmet C. Higgins, 100 N. Tenth St.

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146—Paterson. Charles S. Gall, 378 Dakota St.

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34—New York City. St. Mary's Men's Club, 142 Alexander Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.
93—Rochester. Thomas C. Murphy, 62 Swan St.
107—New York City. Bronx Division, U. S. Junior Naval Reserves, 3132 Webster Ave.
140—New York City. L. D. Montgomery, U.S.S. *Utah.*
147—Youngsville. Harry Malowitz, Youngsville House.
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171—Albany. 224 Greene St.
177—Brooklyn. George Iverson, 306 Macon St.
185—Brooklyn. J. M. Canavan, 69 Bond St.
193—Niagara Falls. Roy Tompkins, 1155 Garret Ave.
194—Hadley. Mrs. Chas. H. Black.
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205—Newburgh. Jacques Teller, 5 Golden St.

North Carolina—92—Asheville. B. Taylor and C. M. Gravatt. The Southern Spar and Mica Co., 322 Haywood Bldg.
133—Pine Bluff. N. Steve Hutchings.
159—Waynesville. Harry M. Hall, 720 Walnut St.

North Dakota—160—Fargo. James E. Cowan, Central Garage, rear Grand Theatre.
206—Fairmount. Frank Kitchener, Richland Hotel.

Ohio—58—Cleveland. J. F. Thompson, Community Pharmacy, 9505 Denison Ave.
52—Ulrichsville. Anthony Sciarra, 329 W. Fourth St.
63—Ulrichsville. Chas. F. Burroway, 312 Water St.
75—Columbus. Chas. W. Jenkins, 54 S. Burgess Ave.
113—Buena Vista. Geo. T. Watters.
166—Toledo. Frank P. Carey, 3267 Maplewood Ave., or wherever his Ford happens to be.
207—Columbus. Tod S. Raper, 77 Taylor Ave.

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Oregon—4—Salem. D. Wiggins.
187—Portland. W. J. Belduke, 29½ N. Ninth St.

Pennsylvania—20—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. Ninth St.
21—Braddock. Clarence Jenkins, Union News Co.
24—Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach. 4159 N. Eighth Street, and Spring Mills Station, P. & R. Ry. Co., Montgomery County.
78—Pittsburgh. Peter C. Szarmach, 3201 Brereton St.
100—Philadelphia. Veterans of Foreign Wars, 926 N. 41st St.
121—Philadelphia. Don L. Brown, 3444 D St.
152—Harrisburg. Mrs. L. H. Wistrand, Box 1027.
182—Greensburg. Don Frederick Wermuth.

South Dakota—179—Fairburn. Jesse K. Fell, *Custer County Press.*

Tennessee—195—Knoxville. C. G. Pruden, 2024 Rose Ave.

Texas—33—Houston. J. M. Shamblin, 4805 Oakland St.
123—San Juan. D. L. Carter, Box 436.
134—Breckenridge. Joe Randel, 226 Baylor Avenue.
135—Mexia. Charles O. Hurley, M. D.
148—Port Arthur. Ralph C. Cornwell, 215 Eighth St.
174—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West Eighth St.
183—South San Antonio. J. F. Nicodemus, Box 111, So. San Antonio Transfer.
208—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West 8th St.

Utah—157—Salt Lake City. Ned Howard, 127 N. St.

Vermont—56—Fort Ethan Allen. E. Worth Benson, Box 10.

Virginia—108—Cape Charles. Lynn Stevenson, Custom House Building.

Washington—1—Ione. A. S. Albert, Albert's Billiard Hall.
61—Burlington. Judge B. N. Albertson, Fairhaven Ave.
83—Seattle. Chas. D. Raymer, Raymer's Old Book-Store, 1330 First Ave.
153—Monroe. Ed. L. Carson, *The Monitor.*
154—Mt. Vernon. Miss Beatrice Bell, Western Washington Auto Club.
155—Olympia. B. F. Hume, Commercial Club Rooms.
172—Sunnyside. Mark Austin.
196—Arlington. F. T. Herzinger.

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Wisconsin—41—Madison. Frank Weston, 401 Gay Bldg.
5—Milwaukee. Paul A. Buerger, Apt. V, 1305 Cedar St.
138—Tomahawk Lake. Mrs. J. S. Hughson, Hughson's Resort.

Africa—173—Sinkat, Red Sea Province, Sudan. W. T. Moffat.

Australia—39—Melbourne. William H. Turner, 52 Emmaline St., Northcote; and Carters' and Drivers' Union, 46 William St.
76—Victoria. Chas. M. Healy, 30, The Avenue, Windsor Post, Dist. No. 8.
130—Brisbane. H. V. Shead, Sutton St., Kangaroo Pt.

Belgium—131—Antwerp. Reuben S. James, Rue Chapelle de Grace 4,—Grate Kapel-straat, 4.

Canada—31—Howe Sound. C. Plowden, Plowden Bay.
84—White Rock, B. C. Charles L. Thompson.
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124—Hartshorn, Alberta. Leonard Brown, 33-34-17 W4M.
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Newfoundland—132—St. John's. P. C. Mara, Smallwood Bldg.

Canal Zone—37—Cristobal. F. E. Stevens.
156—Ancon. Arthur Haughton, Box 413.

Cuba—15—Havana. Ricardo N. Farres, Dominques, 7 Cerro.
175—Miranda, Oriente. Volney L. Held.

Great Britain—65—North Wales. William J. Cooper, "Kia-Ora," Plastirion Ave., Prestatyn.

Hawaiian Islands—170—Leilehua, Oahu. Château Shanty.

Honduras, C. A.—32—Galeras, Olancho. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson.
70—La Ceiba. Jos. Buckly Taylor.

India—197—Calcutta. Wm. Leishman, 46 Wellesley St.

Mexico—68—Guadalajara, Jal. W. C. Money, Hotel Fenix, Calle Lopez, Cotilla Nos. 269 a 281.
136—Tampico, Tamps. Jack Hester, care of T. D. El Humo, Apartado 238.

Navy—71—U. S. *Arizona.* Elmer E. McLean.

Porto Rico—46—Ensenada. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 5.

Philippine Islands—198—Manila. W. W. Weston, De La Rama Bldg.

West Indies—199—Santo Domingo. A. W. Wells, Estate Consuelo, San Pedro de Marcoris, R. D.

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QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular exoert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4, 5. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—17. Asia. In Four Parts
18—25. Africa. In Eight Parts
26. Turkey and Asia Minor
27—29. Balkans. In Three Parts
30. Scandinavia
31. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
32—34. South America. In Three Parts
35. Central America
36, 37. Mexico. In Two Parts
38—44. Canada. In Seven Parts
45. Alaska
46. Baffinland and Greenland
47—52. Western U. S. In Six Parts
53—56. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
57—62. Eastern U. S. In Six Parts
Radio
Mining and Prospecting
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
Tropical Forestry
Aviation
Army Matters, United States and Foreign
Standing Information

Vanilla Culture

THE South Sea Islands' most valuable product:

Question:—"I take the liberty of asking a few questions concerning the South Sea Islands in general. What are the chances of a man with a capital of about one thousand dollars to make a decent living raising vanilla beans? I see by the papers that they bring a big price at wholesale. Is it because they are so hard to raise that makes them so high? Could you give me information or tell me where I could get any information in regard to raising the vanilla bean for the market?

Please let me know in what particular district the vanilla bean is raised best and what the land is worth per acre. Would one have to take farm machinery from here, or could he buy it there as cheap?

How may a foreigner obtain land—by buying, homesteading or leasing? Do they have any trouble with the natives?

Also let me know which is the best way to travel. Can a white man from this coast live in that climate and not get any or some sort of fever?

If you should have time, please give me some information in regard to pearling and the equipment required for said industry. What district is best? Let me know where I can get books dealing with pearls.

Would be very glad to pay you for whatever trouble I may cause you."—J. BLUMENSTIEL, Oakland, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. C. Brown, Jr.:—Of all the South Sea products vanilla is, as a rule, the most valuable. Tahiti, one of the eleven Society Islands and the capital of French Oceania, produces one-half the vanilla consumed throughout the world each year. Market and planting conditions have much to do with its price wholesale.

While there is considerable land for sale throughout the Society Islands, it is not always easy, especially for the newcomer, to buy a piece with a clear title. Indeed, some disastrous things have happened to men as a result of their not having secured a clean bill of sale. You see, among the natives land has changed hands so often without being officially recorded that it is doubtful whether a clear title can ever be got for some pieces that I know of.

The best method for a man in your circumstances is to lease whatever land is needed for the project. Ten or fifteen acres of vanilla will keep one quite busy. This amount of land can be leased for a very reasonable figure, either from a native or from a large white landowner. Nine years will be the length of the lease, with as many renewals as the two of you can agree on.

But you should have at least two thousand five hundred dollars with which to begin the venture. Don't try it on the amount you have named.

Forget the farm machinery. One never plows land in the South Seas. At least I have not heard of it being done. As a vanilla planter your hands will mean more to you than the most expensive piece of machinery.

You have asked about tropical diseases. Elephantiasis and leprosy are prevalent. By taking careful precautions one can escape both of these.

Pearling is not a white man's game—that is, out in French Oceania. The Paumotu Islands, which contain some of the richest oyster beds in the world, are administered solely for the natives. They do the diving, then sell their prizes to white buyers and the trading concerns.

Write to Hind, Rolph & Co., General Agents, 230 California Street, San Francisco, for rates and sailings to Papeete, Tahiti.

Also write to A. M. & J. Ferguson, Colombo, Ceylon, for a copy of their book, "All about Vanilla." This book is a practical instructor.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

How Much a Dog-Team Can Pull

ALSO a few tips about Koyukuk, and the game of the neighborhood:

Question:—"Here are a few questions I would like to have you answer:

How many pounds can an ordinary team of five dogs haul over the snow?

Is the country around the Yukon hills on the Koyukuk River very heavily wooded?

What kind of game and fur-bearing animals inhabit that part of Alaska?

What kind of food should one take on a trip up the Koyukuk?"—E. D. LA ROCQUE, Olongapo, P. I.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—It all depends on the condition of the snow—and of course the quality of the dogs also. On a hard-bottom trail with the snow "slick," not too cold, say in April, they might haul a ton on a dead level if you helped them start it.

A dog will pull his own weight in almost any kind of going. They weigh fifty to eighty pounds. So there you are. They are probably the best pullers of any of the draft animals, especially in the matter of endurance.

No, the Koyukuk is not heavily wooded, and not continuously. However, the flats and sheltered side hills are covered with a fairly thick growth of spruce which runs as big as two feet or more and fifty feet high, about an average. It is excellent timber for building and boat use, white and fine-grained and soft, and does not warp or split readily.

The fur-bearers are the same as in all northern countries, though not much marten or wolverene. There are caribou and some bear among game animals and of course small animals and birds, ptarmigan particularly.

Don't take any food in Alaska. Buy it up there. It should be the regular equipment of the miner everywhere and will easily be obtained at any trading-post in the vicinity. However, if you know exactly where you are going and can get transportation from Seattle, you will save something by buying below.

Dried cereals and beans and rice and fruit, bacon, coffee, tea, milk, butter, sugar and some canned goods to ward off scurvy, though your fresh meat and fish will do that better. Also evaporated vegetables, including lots of potatoes. That's the stuff.

Chances in New Zealand's Mines

THOUGH rich in minerals, oddly enough the country is minus millionaires:

Question:—"Have noticed that you have charge of the New Zealand section of 'Ask Adventure,' and as I would like some definite information on the country am taking this chance to find out.

First I suppose that I should say something about myself and my buddy, so here goes. We are students at the Colorado School of Mines, having had a year's schooling. We will be forced to stay out of school for the next year because of financial reasons, so we are compelled to find something to work at to get enough money to allow us to carry on. I have had quite a bit of experience sailoring, and my buddy was with the Government on the Galveston Sea Wall Extension for two years. We

both can drive most makes of cars, and make minor repairs on same.

What we would like to know is:

1. What are the chances for two men minus capital, but strong, healthy and willing to work, to make enough money to go to school on?
2. How much does it cost to live there?
3. Is there any mining there?
4. Any chance to prospect?
5. Is there a school of mines in New Zealand, or any other sort of a college where one can get college work?
6. What is the pay a month in the industries?
7. How is the climate?
8. What is the most direct route to New Zealand? Is there any chance of working our passage across?

I guess that's about all the questions I can think of, but if there is any other information of interest we would be grateful for it."—JACK DEWEY, FRED SAPPER, Golden, Colo.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—With all the best intentions in the world and good wishes for yourself and your buddy, you certainly put a poser to me.

1. This New Zealand is not a get-rich-quick country. It is our boast that it is a country minus millionaires. I am of the opinion that if you two come over here you will have to get down to work and stick it out. You could not come over here for twelve months and then go back to school at Colorado some more.

2. It costs just about the same amount to live as over at your place.

3 and 4. New Zealand is wonderfully rich in minerals, and if you had finished your schooling at the game, prospecting would give you a fine opportunity and prove well worth while, especially in the far-down West Coast of the South Island.

5. There is a very fine school of mines run by the New Zealand Government in the Thames district, east of the Auckland Province, where we have our richest gold-mines. There is also a fine university at Auckland, which is our most northern port and city.

6. The pay depends upon the work you do, but in the gold-mining for laboring work, five dollars per day of eight hours; and an engineer's job commands ten dollars and upward per day.

7. The climate all over New Zealand is equable and temperate, without such extremes as you suffer in Summer and Winter in Colorado.

8. There are two direct routes from American ports, and the cost is much the same from each: (*a*) A three-weekly mail-steamer service from San Francisco to Wellington, our capital city, (*b*) a three-weekly service from the British Columbia port of Vancouver, to Auckland. I should think you would have a better chance of working your passages if you went to New York, or one of the other seaports, and secured a job on a tramp steamer or a sailing-ship that was working its way through the Pacific to New Zealand.

Histories of Montana

THE abundance of source documents, as well as of derivative works, is rather surprizing, in view of the fact that that section of the United States has been known to white men for only a little over a century:

Question:—"Enclosed find addressed envelop and stamps. Kindly send me early history of Montana."—HOWARD WEAVER, Valley, Wash.

Answer, by Mr. Davis:—I am requesting the State Department of Agriculture to send you one of their publications (page 6) which gives more of the early history of Montana than I could include in a letter. For additional information get from the public library "Vigilante Days and Ways," by N. P. Langford. You might also be interested in the Wheeler edition, two volumes, of the Lewis & Clark Expedition.

Warner, Beers & Co. published a history of Montana in 1885. Joaquin Miller also published an illustrated history of Montana. Martin H. Chittenden published in three volumes "History of the American Fur Trade of the Far West." There are a great many other volumes available on the early history of Montana as well as other Northwestern States.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

About Ecuador

ALSO about the Galapagos Islands and a couple of Andean railroads—all unique in their way:

Question:—"I wish to learn all I possibly can of the manners, customs and laws, especially immigration laws, of Ecuador. Can you give any information on the Galapagos Archipelago? Am deeply interested; wish to know price of land, if suitable for cultivation, climate year around, distance from mainland.

I have a one-hundred-ton schooner. What price can be obtained for different crops, and what crops are most suitable? Expect to use native labor; have working knowledge of Spanish; some money—about five thousand dollars. Will be grateful for the desired information. Any literature on this subject will be diligently read, and will gladly pay any charges. Please do not print my name."— ——, San Quentin, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Young: Ecuador is situated on and near the equator, from which it derives its name, in the northwestern portion of South America.

Boundaries: North by Colombia, south by Peru, east by Colombia and Peru and west by the Pacific Ocean.

Area: About 116,000 square miles. Boundaries between Peru and Colombia in dispute.

Physical appearance: The shape of Ecuador might roughly be compared to a slice of pie entering as a wdge between the southern boundary of Colombia and northern boundary of Peru, with four-fifths of its area lying south of the equator. The distance from the coast to the extreme point of its eastern boundary is between six and seven hundred miles.

Unlike the mountains of Colombia, which are formed by the main north-and-south range having split itself into three parts, the main chain of the Andes is well defined in Ecuador as it passes almost due north and south along the Pacific coast. The coastal plains are narrow with

the exception of a few projecting peninsulas and along a few of the rivers. Having crossed the mountains it will be found that they drop rapidly down to the plains of the upper headwaters of the Amazon River, extensive forests and grassy savannas lying from 400 to 800 feet above sea level and 2,000 miles from the Atlantic Ocean. If you enter Ecuador at the coast and pass directly over the mountains a torrid region would be at first encountered and a temperate zone after reaching an altitude of some 5,000 feet and continuing to about 10,000; above this a cold region would be found, growing colder until perpetual snow and ice were encountered on the tops of the mountains. Descending on the eastern slopes the same zones would be encountered.

Thus Ecuador affords any climate that man desires simply by traveling up or down the mountain slopes. A man can die from cold on the equator in Ecuador and at other points along it suffer from the heat, although temperatures of over 87 are rare.

Islands: The Galapagos Islands, lying 730 miles off the coast, belong to Ecuador. The combined area of this group is some 2,400 miles with a population of less than a thousand. They are noted for their immense land turtles, some of which are hundreds if not thousands of years old, and also for the peculiarity of the vegetable and animal life, which is distinctly different from that of the mainland and also from any other portion of the world.

There is a theory that these islands are the last of an immense continent which once filled a great portion of the Pacific Ocean and has gradually sunk. The ruins on the island of Easter in the south Pacific are also pointed to as evidence of the same thing. Some of the stone idols on this island are of extreme size and with crowns of colored stone weighing up into the tons. No one knows who made them. Also no one has yet given a plausible theory as to the reason why vegetable and animal life should be different on the Galapagos Islands.

I have cruised along the coasts of several of the islands, and on one trip we took on the manager of the McCormick Harvester Company plantation where they raise sisal—or some other sort of hemp—to make twine out of. I don't know whether they still own this planatation or not, but from the manager's account it was doing fine when he started on his vacation several years ago.

Much of the land on these islands is owned by the Ecuadorian Government and doubtless could be bought for a small price per acre. They are also noted for their snakes. I saw these snakes miles out at sea, floating on the water, and I understand they are venomous, although a cable operator who was on another island nearer the coast told me they were sea snakes and entirely harmless.

I also saw hundred of sea turtles floating on the sea, some of them at least six feet across the back. These are a different turtle from the land turtles I mentioned, which creep around over the islands and go to water-holes every few months for water. They have worn paths deep into the earth and stone over which they travel.

These islands are cooled by sea breezes and have a pleasant climate much superior to the coast of the mainland. They formerly were the rendezvous of pirates and later of whalers. There are stories of hidden treasure, but in my opinion without much foundation; for I never took much stock in a man burying large sums of gold and jewels, although some men may be hipped along that line. I'm giving you all I know about these islands; and there is little else I can refer you to, except the ancient account of Darwin in his "Voyage of the *Beagle*," who came there to study the strange life.

Volcanoes of Ecuador: The highest peaks of the Andes in Ecuador are either active or dead volcanoes. The highest one, Chimborazo (20,498 feet) now extinct was formerly supposed to be the highest mountain in South America but has been found to be surpassed by more than fifty peaks farther south. Aconcagua, on the border between Chile and Argentine, is over 2,000 feet higher. Cotopaxi (19,613 feet) and Sanguay (17,464 feet) are most notable among the active volcanoes of Ecuador.

Flora and fauna (vegetable and animal life): A good description of this is given in the Encyclopedia Britannica under heading of "Ecuador."

Exports: The principal ones are cacao, of which Ecuador supplies the world with over twenty per cent. of the total used; coffee, jipi-japa hats (the "Panama" hats of commerce) tagua (or vegetable ivory for button-making), rubber, gold, fiber for hats, hides, tobacco, cotton, alligator skins and fruits.

The G. & Q. R. R. This railroad is 297 miles long and connects the principal port of Ecuador, Guayaquil, with the capital, Quito. The coast terminus is at Duren, across the river from Guayaquil, from which city it is reached by launch.

For the first thirty miles the road passes through low, swampy, heavily forested plains, with sugar and fruit plantations at intervals; then begins a gradual climb to an altitude of some 5,000 feet to Huigra, where the general offices are located. Leaving Huigra, the way appears to be blocked by solid walls and cliffs reaching to the skies. Twisting back and forth up the cañons, a point is reached where it was necessary to cut zigzag switch-backs with switches at each end in the solid rock.

After attaining an altitude of 9,000 feet in this manner the ascent is made gradually until another wall is found blocking Palmyra Pass. This is ascended by another switch-back and a stretch of the heaviest grade in existence to an altitude of 12,000 feet.

A gradual descent is begun through the high plateaus and valleys, passing through the cities of Cajamarca, Rio Bamba, Ambato and other cities peopled by pure-blooded Quechua Indians, little different from what they were in the days of the conquest, poncho-clad men wearing fiber sandals and peaked hats (the original "Panama" hat in its original habitat, high, cold, bleak country—made for service and warmth, worn by men and women) women with heavy skirts of llama wool squatting over their bare feet to keep them warm as they spin llama wool into yarn with tiny hand looms; cud-chewing llamas, the giant sheep-like pack animal of the highlands, lying on their bellies with their legs curled under them.

You pass first into the great, extinct, snow-clad Chimborazo, and, nearing Quito, the smoking Cotopaxi, with a dozen other peaks always in sight. In places the plateau floor has been desert waste with sand heaped in horn-shaped dunes (horns of sand pointing toward the wind) in others the tiny streams have cut gashes deep into the lava ash, on top of which farms have been cut into checkerboards, each square the size of what one peon can tend; and yet in others very rocky places and valleys and bleak lava wastes.

Quito is finally reached after having taken two days for the journey. The railroad division point is at Rio Bamba, where a stop-over is made for the night.

The scenery along this road is extremely rugged, and it exists as a memorial to the American engineer whose monument is in the station yard at Huigra. It is excelled only by the Peru Central, that colossal engineering feat that stands alone as the wonder of railroad construction in Peru and in the whole world. The man who built it was an ex-convict from San Quentin Penitentiary in California. The mountain through which the road pierces the last of the peaks with the Galera tunnel is called Mount Meiggs, and there is always an American flag waving from this peak. A trip up over the Peru Central is one that a man will never forget, and I would advise you to make it if you are down in this part.

Guayaquil: This principal port of Ecuador is located on the Guayas River, some forty miles from the sea. It was formerly called "the graveyard of South America," due to the continual presence of yellow fever, bubonic plague, leprosy, malaria, smallpox, dysentery and many other ailments; but during the past few years it has been cleaned up by installing modern sanitation and by pumping in sand to raise it above the level of the river. Having done this is was possible to instal modern sewerage systems and drains for the streets. Formerly human excrement was deposited in empty beer-kegs and dumped into the streets, which were quagmires of mud and slime, inhabited by reptiles and breeding poisonous mosquitoes. There is no gainsaying the fact that conditions in Guayaquil were frightful in the old days. The present population of Guayaquil is between 60,000 and 70,000.

Traffic on the river is carried on by means of river streamers, canoes, rafts of bamboo. Live cattle are rafted by tying them by the horns to poles thrown over canoes, twelve cattle to a canoe, and making them swim by prodding with a pole armed with a sharp iron spike. With the current they make good time. When they get to the slaughter-house below Guayaquil they walk up a sloping bank and are allowed to lie down and rest for a time and then are driven into the pens.

Huigra: It is wonderful what a difference a few thousand feet will make in climate and health. This beautiful little town is just above the fever zone on the bank of a roaring torrent. The town is principally composed of adobe and thatch buildings with the exception of the general office buildings of the railroad company and a hotel presided over by a Scotch lady. These two buildings are of wood.

Other towns along the railroad: After leaving Duran the first villages encountered are built of bamboo with thatched roofs, many of the huts being built high above the ground on pilings of bamboo and reached by ladders. Gradually the type changes as the ascent is made until in the highlands the towns are composed of buildings made of huge cut stones (ancient Inca dwellings) and plastered adobe.

Quito, the capital, is situated on an elevated plateau surrounded by mountains at an altitude of over 9,000 feet. The climate is as delightful as that of Bogota, Colombia, the temperature ranging at between 50 and 70 F. the year around.

A few hours up the slopes of the surrounding mountains will place one in the region of perpetual snow, and a few hours down the eastern slopes on the other side of the range will place one in a sultry, tropical climate. The markets of Quito are continually filled with fruits and vegetables at all seasons. To an American just arriving in Quito from modern American cities the city would present the appearance of Jerusalem in Bible times. The population is around 80,000, and the blood will run 95 per cent. pure Indian. A great number of the buildings were constructed before the Spanish conquest. Some of the churches are decorated on the inside with quantities of pure gold in the form of slabs.

Please see the attached reference list. The booklet "Ecuador" will be mailed free upon request by the Pan-American Union of Washington, D. C. Also write Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Washington, D. C., for supplements to commerce reports covering Ecuador.

The Single-Action Army Colt

"OL' MAN WIGGINS' " pet gun:

Question:—"You know the old saying, 'When you need a gun you need it bad.' This is sure true in my case. I am a member of the Canadian Mounted Police.

The Government furnish us with the .45 Colt New Service gun, a gun that is too well known by you to require any further description by me. This gun does not appear to me to be a gun adapted to fast work; I mean for a quick draw and accurate shooting combined.

I have seen a few .45 Colt's single-action guns, and they appear to me as a gun made more for fast drawing. I have never used one of them, although I have done a lot of shooting with a revolver and am holder of the third highest score in the force; but I always used the .45 Colt's New Service gun.

You are an expert on guns and ammunition, and I would much appreciate your opinion as to which gun you would prefer to use where a quick draw and accurate shooting would be the deciding feature.

I am also at a loss to know where to obtain one .45 Colt's single action, as I do not believe the Colt people manufacture this gun any more. Is this gun made with more than one length of barrel? Could I be able to obtain ammunition for same, as it appears to me the single-action cartridges are longer than the New Service ones?

I would much appreciate your advice as to the above."—D. E. FORSLAND, Bankhead, Alta., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—The single-action Army Colt revolver—often known as the "Frontier" or "Old Reliable"—is still manufactured, and I presume it will always be so. It's the acme of reliability and certainty of operation in one-hand weapons, to my way of thinking. I may add that I own and use ten revolvers of calibers .22 to .45, and the old single-action Colt is unsurpassed in my opinion for what a revolver is made for first.

You should be able to secure one of the revolvers, a description of which you will find enclosed, from D. Pike & Co., No. 123 King St., East, Toronto, Canada. They are large dealers in such matters, and I am sure can fill your wants perfectly. In case they can not, I am sure a letter direct to the Colt firm will solve the problem perfectly. Their

address is the Colt's Patent Firearms Mfg. Co., Hartford, Conn., U. S. A.

As to the speed of the old Colt, I am not prepared to say just what can be done, but if I recall correctly the time secured by the Newman timer showed a draw and shot in about ⅞ second. I can average a shot a second from the word; for the five shots I can average a shot a second from the word "Fire" as I carry only five shells in the revolver, and the hammer down on an empty chamber. And I got a crippled gun-arm from the late scrap, too.

You will find the .45 cartridges you have will work all right in the .45 S. A. They are merely loaded in a shorter shell and with a little less powder.

We hear so much in regard to the "Mounties" nowadays, they having supplanted cowboys in the moving pictures as the heroes of the film, that I am doubly glad to get your letter.

How to Make a Leather Vest

SIMPLE enough when the trick's explained:

Question:—"I want to buy me a cowhide vest, a vest with the hair on. I would prefer it without sleeves but could use it with sleeves all O. K.

Now I wish you would tell me where I could buy the vest I have in mind. I would want it to have pockets in it, both on the outside and the inside, without a collar; just a plain neck. Would want it to be lined with brown canvas duck or some other lining of equal weight.

Will you please tell me where I can find such a vest?"—D. S. MATHEWS, Clarendon, Tex.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—The kind of vest that you have in mind is usually made to an individual's order, for the demand for such apparel is not sufficient for the making of them for the "ready-made" trade. You could make one yourself for about one-fifth the cost that a harness-maker or leather-worker would charge you to make one. The leather jerkins that were issued by the Army during our late war would be something on the order of what you are wanting, except that the leather is slick and there are no pockets. These jerkins may be had from stores that are handling Army-issued supplies in our principal cities.

You can try your hand at making one though if you want to. Here is the way: Take a hide tanned with the hair on it. Place this on the table with the hair underneath and then take your vest and lay it on. Use some tacks or small nails to drive through the cloth and the hide so as to keep them from slipping.

Take a safety-razor blade and cut around the vest, and then the arm-holes. A blade would be better for this work than a pair of scissors, for the blade will not make the hair jagged as would be the case with scissors.

Make some slits for the pockets on the outside the size that you want them to be. Make the pockets out of ducking and sew from the inside out, then turn back through the slit. This will leave a fine cloth margin over the skin. Then make your lining out of duck—split it down the center, allowing about an inch to be lapped over down the back. Sew the ducking to the hide on the under side around the edges and around the neck, then turn the hide over and sew the two pieces together down the back. Make slits in the ducking where you want to put the inside pockets, make the pockets and sew them in.

Now turn the hairy side out. Whip the bottom of the hide and the ducking together. Sew around the arm-holes, using separate pieces of cloth so that the job will be a smooth one.

Get shoemaker's thread and wax. Next get some hooks and eyes that are used on raincoats and put about four of these on the inside, sewed to the lining so that when they are sewed and fastened together they will not show on the outside and the hair laps over the opening.

Make a pattern first out of cloth so that you can get the idea how it can be done, before you start cutting up your hide. Go to a hide-house or to a slaughter-pen and get your hide. It ought not to cost very much where you are. Have some old-timer tan the hide for you—or tan it yourself in a few days' time. Somebody there can tell you how if you do not already know.

Shanty-Boating on the Missouri

ALSO a few hints on how to build the shanty-boat:

Question:—"I am planning to build a shanty-boat at Ft. Benton, Mont., this Spring and go down the Missouri to the Mississippi and then on to New Orleans.

I have planned to build the boat 10 x 24 feet, and as I do not wish to sacrifice strength for lightness I am hesitating as to the material to use for the hull.

What idiosyncrasies of the river should I watch for and avoid on the trip? Are there any dams that are not navigable between the mouth of the river and Ft. Benton? I am enclosing addressed envelop and postage."—M. C. CLARK, Judith Gap, Mont.

Answer, by Mr. Zerr:—In regard to the construction of a shanty-boat I talked it over with a boat-builder and he said that instead of 10 x 24 feet you should build it six feet longer as it would be safer and more easily handled. The few extra feet would hardly add to the costs. Your cabin should be about eight feet high; to build it higher would mean a greater wind resistance. Your gunwales should be of 4-inch material, while the bottom should be of 2-inch planks. The latter is very important as the Missouri River from Benton to Carroll, 160 miles, is known as the rocky river and from there to Sioux City is known as the sandy river.

Fort Benton is the head of navigation for the Missouri River, and the navigation season extends from March to December. It is a shifting stream with many snags and caving banks and carries much sediment, destroying land by erosion. It has a swift current and a very steep slope for such a large stream. The slope from the mouth of the river to the Yellowstone River is 0.84 in a distance of 1,760 miles, with a width of from 1,000 to 1,200 feet; from the Yellowstone River to Fort Benton, a distance of 525 miles, the fall is 1.4 feet with a width of from 800 to 1,000 feet. The elevation above sea-level at the mouth is 397.5 feet and at Fort Benton 2,616 feet. Some drop!

The length from Fort Benton to the mouth is 2,285 miles; to the mouth of the Red River, 860 miles and to New Orleans, 214 miles.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

EVER since "Adam delved and Eve span" man has sung at his work—either solitarily to help the hours pass, or in groups to establish that swing and rhythm which lightens labor and makes for efficiency. And, seeing this, wise leaders in all ages have encouraged singing. A singing army is a fighting army; in the days of sailing-ships and "tall-water" sailors a good chantey was recognized as worth two extra men on a rope.

It is curious, too, how quickly a song will produce a feeling of comradeship. In this respect the result of group singing is second only to the hallowed rite of breaking bread and eating salt. Men who have sung together on the long trail are comrades and brothers; the motley group of men differing in age and nationality that gathered on ship at the beginning of a voyage ceased to be strangers and became a *crew* when once they had pulled and sung together.

A not unimportant part of the songs of the people are sometimes called by scholars "work-songs." Just what constitutes "work-songs" as a class distinct from other songs, it is impossible accurately to say, for any song may be so used. But there are certain traits of the class as a whole that are recognizable.

First of all, work-songs are likely to have a very marked rhythm and to contain a "refrain"—one or more lines repeated in identical position in each verse such as the "Parlez vous. . . Parlez vous. . . Hinky dinky parlez vous" of a well-known song of the Great War.

Work-songs seldom tell any long or consecutive story, partly because men when at work can not create, recollect or even listen to complicated narrative without distracting their attention from the task at hand, and partly because such songs are usually cut short or added to on the spot as the length of the task demands. This last process is particularly noticeable in the sailor chanteys, where a long haul resulted instantly in the addition of improvised verses to eke out the song. And in both chanteys and negro songs many cases can be found where verses belonging to quite different songs have been brought together—often with humorous results—for the same purpose. In both cases the one essential is that the song shall be kept going regardless of logical sequences.

The singing of group songs is usually divided between a leader and the remainder of the group, he singing what may be termed the solo lines, and they joining in only on the refrain.

All such songs are rapidly disappearing under modern conditions of trained specialists aided by machinery. Like the ballad they could live only "in the group." The chantey has gone from the sea; the mowing song is a thing unknown; the very existence of songs of the threshing, husking, or harvest home has well-nigh been forgotten.

I'M GOING to print a few samples from my collection and then ask you to send in before it's too late as many of these songs covering as many different types of work as you can.

The following bit came to me in 1917 from Mr. H. Berlack, then a student at Harvard, who had heard it used by a gang of negroes as they were driving spikes in the railroad ties. In time with the refrain the sledges struck. I follow Mr. Berlack's spelling in his attempt to reproduce the dialect:

Ole Aunt Dinah
Bumpy ditty bump-bump! (*Sledges*)
Settin' in de co'nah.
Bumpy ditty bump!

She got de ole ax
Bumpy ditty bump-bump!
Settin' rat b'side huh.
Bumpy ditty bump!

Ole Unk' Henry
Bumpy ditty bump-bump!
Come roun' de co'nah.
Bumpy ditty bump!

He see de ole ax
Bumpy ditty bump-bump!
Scoot lak de debil.
Bumpy ditty BUMP!

The second is a true chantey from a sailor reader who had for years kept by him a note-book in which he had jotted down songs, and which he generously contributed. The solo lines are sung by the chanteyman, the group joining in with the refrain after each line and pulling on the words "roll" and "down." Old-time sailors will recognize it as a curious blending of several separate chanteys popular at the time when cotton was squeezed tightly into the holds of ships by means of screw presses.

(*Solo*) Come rock and roll me over
(*Refrain*) *Roll the cotton down!*
(*Solo*) From Calais unto Dover
(*Refrain*) *Oh! Roll the cotton down!*

Have you ever been in Mobile Bay
Screwing cotton day by day?

Five dollars a day is a white man's pay,
So bring your hooks and screws this way.

And bring your samson post likewise.
Bear a hand! Get a curve on, boys!

We'll floor her off both fore and aft;
There's five thousand for this here craft.

Tier by tier we'll stow so neat
Till she is loaded up complete.

As I was walking down the street
A fair young girl I chanced to meet.

She was a clipper fair to view;
Her cheeks were red, her eyes were blue.

I asked her if she'd take a trip
Down to the docks and see my ship.

"Thank you, sir," she answered, "no.
I'm sorry, sir, I can not go.

"My love is young and he is true;
He dresses in a suit of blue."

So then I quickly went away;
I had not another word to say.

To the mast-head this yard must go.
Tighten the leaches and the foot will show!

One more pull and the mate will say,
Roll the cotton down!
"One more pull and then belay!"
Roll the cotton down!

MANY thanks to all those who have sent in contributions. Here's hoping that the rest of you will do as well. Anything that you think we'd all like to hear is always acceptable. And the more that comes in the better stuff we'll be able to print.

SEND all material and all questions direct to R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Avenue, Berkeley, California. Do not send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

NOVEMBER 20TH ISSUE

Besides the **new serial** and the **four complete novelettes** mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

DERELICT An Off-the-Trail Story* — ***Thomas McMorrow***
Free-lunch or diamonds—or both!

NEITHER MONEY NOR POWER — ***Robert Simpson***
Darron wanted nothing but the Light.

THE TRAMP A Three-Part Story Conclusion — ***W. Townend***
"Red" Hannigan explains matters.

THE MOST HATED MAN — ***John Webb***
A midnight fight in the streets of Port au Prince.

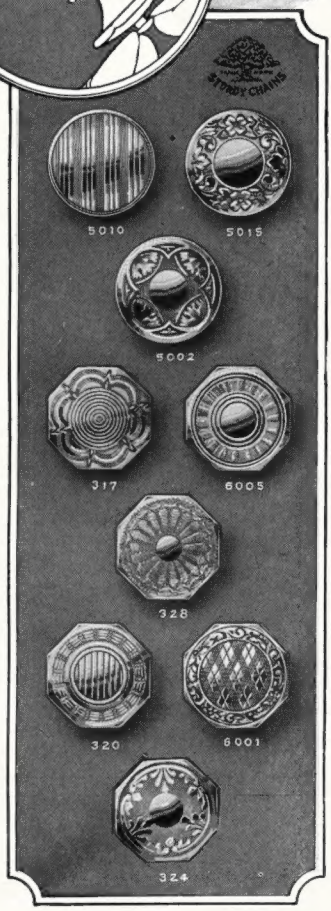
HILLBILLIES — ***Ramsey Benson***
When the oil-boom struck the mountain country, city crooks followed close behind.

THE MAN HE WAS — ***Ernest Douglas***
The old sheriff stages a two-gun come-back.

**See note at foot of first contents page.*

Still Farther Ahead

IN THE three issues following the next there will be *long stories* (all complete novelettes) by Arthur D. Howden Smith, Sidney Herschel Small, Talbot Mundy, Conroy Kroder, Leonard H. Nason, T. S. Stribling, Charles Victor Fischer, Frank Robertson, Gerald B. Breitigam and J. D. Newsom; and short stories by W. C. Tuttle, Bill Adams, George E. Holt, William Byron Mowery, Frederick Moore, John Webb, H. C. Bailey, Clements Ripley and many others—stories of the North Seas and the South, Japan, Arabia, Europe, the West, the Great War, Africa, California, Asia, all around the globe and here and there in our own country and Canada.



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